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New York

President:	Mr. Nduhungirehe	(Rwanda)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Rutilo
	Australia	Mr. White
	Azerbaijan	Mr. Sharifov
	China	Mr. Zhu Yanwei
	France	Ms. Legendre
	Guatemala	Ms. Bolaños Pérez
	Luxembourg	Mr. Flies
	Morocco	Mr. Erroja
	Pakistan	Mr. Munir
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Lee Kyung Chul
	Russian Federation	Mr. Listov
	Togo	Mr. Akpoto Komlagan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Day
	United States of America	Mr. Cenzer

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 3.10 p.m.

The President: Under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Cuba, Ecuador and Indonesia to participate in this meeting.

I wish to request all speakers to limit their statements to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting. I would also like to thank Mr. Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for the briefing he gave us this morning.

I would like to make the following three comments. First, the Lebanese Government affirms today, as it always does, its respect for its obligations under international resolutions, including resolution 1701 (2006). On numerous occasions, the Lebanese Government has called for the implementation of all the provisions of that resolution. By the same token, it has often called upon the international community to urge Israel to fulfil its obligations and to end its violations of Lebanese sovereignty by land, sea and air, also in accordance with resolution 1701 (2006).

It is undeniable that the current calm in southern Lebanon reflects my country's commitment to those obligations and the cooperation between the Lebanese Army and the forces of United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). In that regard, we pay tribute to UNIFIL's contribution through its command and its troops. Nonetheless, efforts must be strengthened to move from a cessation of hostilities to a permanent ceasefire.

It should also be underscored that the Israeli air force violates Lebanese airspace on a daily basis, as underscored by the Secretary-General in his periodic report (see S/2013/120). That is a threat to the safety of civilians and is also likely to undermine UNIFIL's mission. In that connection, must I recall that Israel continues to occupy the northern part of Al-Ghajar village and neighbouring regions? That is a gross violation of its obligations under resolution 1701 (2006) and disregards the plan put forward by UNIFIL to bring an end to the occupation. Today we reiterate our call for an end to Israeli occupation of the northern part of the Al-Ghajar village, the Shab'a farms and the Kfar Shuba hills.

Secondly, since our meeting on 18 April on the humanitarian situation in Syria (see S/PV.6949), the situation in that country has worsened further, as has its impact on neighbouring countries, in particular on my country, Lebanon, at all social, economic and security levels. I would therefore like to state that Lebanon is committed, now more than ever, to a policy of dissociation from the crisis in Syria. It is committed to the tenets of the Baabda Declaration, adopted by the National Dialogue Committee in June 2012.

This morning His Excellency, Mr. Michel Sleiman, President of the Republic, reiterated his position that Lebanon will not allow weapons or combatants to be sent to Syria or training camps to be set up in Lebanon. In that regard, he underscored that this position is not only in accordance with the implementation of the Baabda Declaration and the policy of non-interference in Syrian affairs, but also helps to consolidate Syrian national unity and avoids destabilizing the situation.

However, the military impact of the fighting in Syria continues to spread to the border areas with Lebanon and constitutes a gross violation of my country's security. In that connection, we again condemn those who order such violations, whatever their justification may be.

Furthermore, the ongoing influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon is constantly increasing. The number of refugees has increased by 20,000 during the past week, while resources are noticeably decreasing. We are no longer able to meet the basic needs of refugees for housing, food and medicine. Nonetheless, we reiterate that the borders of Lebanon will remain open to Syrian refugees and that Lebanon has no intention to deport anyone. At the same time, we reaffirm our support for the two requests made by the the President of the Republic of Lebanon for the convening of an international conference on Syrian refugees in order to consider ways to share the burden, based on the principal of a shared responsibility, and to establish camps within Syria far from the confrontation zones and close to neighbouring States, under the protection of the United Nations.

Thirdly, returning the to the main topic of today's debate, all reports underscore the fact that Israel is

pursuing its settlement activities in the occupied territories with impunity and in violation of United Nations resolutions, and continues to build the separation wall in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Similarly, it continues to confiscate lands and take control of water sources in contravention of the provisions of conventions signed in Geneva and The Hague.

However, a new factor that is actually both new and old is the worsening of the difficulties experienced by prisoners in Israeli detention. As the Council is aware, since it began its occupation in 1967, Israel has detained over 726,000 Palestinians and left many to rot in prison without trial. Since the beginning of this year, Israel has arrested more than 1,070 Palestinians. Of those, 234 are children, some of whom are only eight years old. Samer Issawi and his companions have continued their hunger strike and their heroic resistance month after month in order to ensure that the cause of Palestinian prisoners is publicized in the international media. Indeed, their cause has been taken up by numerous humanitarian human rights organizations. The conditions that led to the deaths of the two prisoners, including Maysara Abu Hamdiyeh, has shaken international public opinion. However, the Security Council has remained silent in the face of that unacceptable humanitarian tragedy.

In the same context, I should now like to focus on the issue of children in the Israeli military detention system, in particular following the publication of a report on that subject by UNICEF on 6 March. The report documents the most abject, arbitrary, institutional types of maltreatment — including torture, blows and humiliation — inflicted upon Palestinian children when they are stopped or transferred to be interrogated. Those practices include, inter alia, raids into houses and arrests in the middle of the night. They are detained alone, threatened with rape and are not allowed to have their family members present with them. In the report on the subject, UNICEF calls for all measures to be taken to ensure appropriate treatment of Palestinian children who are arrested by the Israeli authorities, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other national instruments.

We are not living on another planet. We are fully aware of the political reasons for this situation, even if we do not approve of the political reasons that have prevented the Council from assuming its responsibilities and bringing an end to Israel's occupation of the Palestinian State and the realization of its independence. But what is stopping the Council from at least adopting a statement to reflect UNICEF's recommendations, based on the most basic humanitarian standards? How can the Council remain silent?

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Khalil (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): We have carefully listened to today's briefing by Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs. My delegation supports the comprehensive statements to be delivered this afternoon by the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and of Djibouti on behalf of the States members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Allow me to add the following observations.

Egypt underscores that Palestine's accession to non-member observer State status in the United Nations pursuant to the adoption of General Assembly resolution 67/19 of 29 November 2012 is a first step towards full membership of the State of Palestine at the United Nations on the basis of the borders of 4 June 1967. We call on the Security Council to respond as soon as possible to the request from the State of Palestine dated 23 September 2011 for full membership at the United Nations (S/2011/592, annex I).

Egypt condemns the continuing illegal Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, in particular around East Jerusalem. We call on the international community to take a firm stand against those illegal practices.

Egypt condemns the ongoing Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people on occupied land, including its siege of the Gaza Strip and pressure on the Palestinian Authority, as well as Israeli settlers continuing to resort to violence against unarmed Palestinians. We call on the international community to work towards an immediate release of the thousands of Palestinian prisoners and detainees held in Israeli detention centres. We condemn the flagrant violations against them, including the deaths of the two prisoners Arafat Jaradat and Maysara Abu Hamdiyeh. We also pay tribute to the struggle of the prisoner Samer Issawi. We hold Israel fully responsible for protecting his life and call for his return to the West Bank.

The Quartet mechanism must be reviewed. The group has made no progress in the past few years, to the point that it cannot even agree on whether to meet.

Egypt supports the recent efforts of the United States of America to resume working for peace following the visit of President Obama to the region. We hope that those efforts will lead to genuine progress this year that moves the Palestinian question forward towards the establishment of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. We welcome the easing of the fiscal restrictions imposed on financial support to the Palestinian side and look forward to Israel lifting all financial sanctions.

Egypt is working for stability in the Gaza Strip. We continue our efforts towards national reconciliation, which certainly merits the clear support of the international community and the parties concerned, not the imposition of obstacles. We express our concern about Israel's continuing defiance of all attempts to calm the situation, including its ongoing aggression against Palestinians and the strengthening of the economic embargo on the Gaza Strip, as well as the restrictions on areas to Palestinian fishermen.

We believe that Egypt's efforts to preserve maintain stability on the Sinai peninsula, including through security cooperation with all parties, have led to the investigation of undocumented media reports of two missiles recently being launched against Israel. To date, we have no specific evidence of the truth of such allegations.

Israel continues to call for an immediate end to acts of violence and bloodshed in Syria by providing urgent assistance to the Syrian refugees and support to the host countries of those refugees. We underscore the need to maintain the unit and territorial integrity of Syrian land and the cohesion of Syrian society. The events taking place in Syria today in no way justify the continuing occupation of the Syrian Golan. We call for the immediate implementation of relevant resolutions regarding the legitimacy of the occupation of the Golan. We call for no settlements in the Golan and Israel's withdrawal from the territory.

In the light of what I have just said, Egypt again calls on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities in order to deal with the Palestinian question with the seriousness that it requires. We further urge the Council to take the necessary measures to put an immediate end to the illegal Israeli settlement activities towards an ultimate solution, in particular since the question of Palestine has been and continues to be the fundamental reason for instability in the Middle East, thereby threatening international peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Fathalla (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to the Security Council for giving me the floor on behalf of the League of Arab States at the first meeting and briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, since the summit meeting of the League of Arab States held at the end of March. The importance of today's meeting lies in the fact that it represents a further link in the communication and contact between the Security Council and the League of Arab States following the Council meeting attended by the Secretary General of the League of Arab States on 26 September 2012 (see S/PV.6841). That meeting led to the adoption of a presidential statement (S/PRST/2012/20) reaffirming the cooperation between the League of Arab States and the United Nations in the area of international peace and security.

I will therefore focus my statement on the contents of the decisions of the recent Arab summit and the statement of the Secretary General of the League of Arab States on the question of Palestine and the developing situation in Syria.

The summit meeting of the League of Arab States adopted resolution 7595, which reaffirms that a just and comprehensive peace is our strategic option. The resolution underscores the fact that the peace process is a comprehensive and indivisible course of action and that a just and comprehensive peace in the region can be achieved only through a complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab and Palestinian territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan, to the lines of 24 June 1967, and the territories still occupied in southern Lebanon.

The resolution reaffirms the need to achieve a just solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative, General Assembly resolution 194 (III), the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the condemnation of all forms of settlement, in line with the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the 2002 Beirut summit and the subsequent summit meetings of the League of Arab States, as well as international law and the relevant terms of reference. The resolution reaffirms that

Palestine is a full partner in the peace process. It calls for continued support for Palestine in its just demand that Israel cease all settlement activities. It further calls for negotiations to be based on the terms of reference of the peace process, namely, the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, the Arab Peace Initiative and the principle of land for peace, and within a specific time frame. It urges that the borders be discussed on the basis of an end to the occupation since 1967 and that the final status issues of the Arab-Israeli conflict, in particular the settlement of the questions of Jerusalem, refugees, borders, land, water rights and Israel's full withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, start to be addressed.

The resolution underscores the fact that the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are a single and indivisible geographic entity, on which, together with all territories occupied since 1967, the independent State of Palestine is to be established, with East Jerusalem as its capital. It also condemns all Israeli efforts to divide the unity of the Palestinian territories, as well as all unilateral measures by Israel.

Since the historic adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 67/19 granting observer status at the United Nations to the State of Palestine, the peace process has been in a stalemate as a result of Israeli settlement activities. The stalemate has led regional and international partners to express concern about the threat it poses to the peace process. Israel's intransigent and continued expansion of settlements in the face of the clear international consensus on their illegality and illegitimacy, their violation of the norms and rules of international law and humanitarian law, and the grave harm they do to the peace process and the achievement of the two-State solution also led the Arab summit to hold Israel wholly responsible for the delays in negotiations.

In that context, the Arab summit called upon the international community to launch serious discussions whose terms of reference should be the implementation of United Nations resolutions, in particular relevant Security Council resolutions — primarily resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) — calling for an end to the occupation and an Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders, an end to the occupation of the territories of the State of Palestine, and the release of Arab and Palestinian prisoners. The summit also called upon the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities and adopt the necessary mechanisms to achieve those ends.

In that context, I note the conclusions adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union on 10 December 2012, which emphasized the urgency of renewed, structured and substantial peace efforts in 2013, as well as the report of the Secretary-General of 8 March 2013, which states that "[t]he year 2013 will be decisive in the peace process" (*A/67/738, para. 25*). The Secretary-General's report also reiterates the five priorities he set forth in that regard in his address to the General Assembly on 22 January 2013, primary among which was the importance of renewing a collective international engagement, which was further emphasized in the Caracas Declaration in Solidarity with the Palestinian People and the State of Palestine of 18 April 2013.

Of course, the commitment of the Security Council, as the United Nations body responsible for maintaining international peace and security, should be in the forefront of that collective international engagement. Further, on 23 January, the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations stated that the United States is still fully committed to direct negotiations, which lends further significance to the forthcoming visit to Washington , D.C., next week by the Arab ministerial delegation following this week's consultations with the Secretary General of the League of Arab States and visits to a number of European States that have taken place since the Arab summit in March.

Moving on to the situation in Syria, the most important development in the context of the Arab League was the adoption of resolution 580 by the Arab summit on 26 March. I will describe some of the resolution's content without getting into too much detail.

First, the resolution welcomes the fact that the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces would now be occupying the seat formerly held by the Syrian Arab Republic in the League of Arab States, its bodies, councils and organizations, until the holding of elections leading to the formation of a Government that can assume authority in Syria.

Secondly, the resolution emphasizes the importance of efforts to reach a political solution in the Syrian crisis as a priority, and the right of States to their own self-defence.

Thirdly, the resolution commends the efforts of neighbouring States and other Arab States in providing for the urgent needs of refugees and calls for support to help those States shoulder the burden of hosting refugees in terms of housing and other assistance, particularly in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, in accordance with the relief plans put forth by their respective Governments.

Fourthly, the resolution calls for an international conference at the United Nations for the reconstruction of Syria and the rehabilitation of infrastructure in all affected sectors as a result of the widespread destruction. In that regard, I also note the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria. The Secretary-General of the League of Arab States held a meeting a Geneva last week with the High Commissioner for Refugees to address all aspects of the crisis, including renewed cooperation between the League of Arab States and Office of the High Commissioner.

In order to reaffirm the importance of cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States to achieve stability, security and good governance in Syria under a democratic system, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States held a number of meetings at the Headquarters of the United Nations in New York on 22 April, the first of which was with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Also in attendance was Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, who chairs the committee formed by the Ministerial Council of the League of Arab States on the crisis in Syria, where a consensus was reached on expressing greater concern about the deteriorating situation in Syria than it has at any other time in the past, taking note of the effects of the crisis on the region, and stating that there is no viable solution to the crisis other than a political solution.

The tripartite talks between the Secretary General of the League of Arab States, the Secretary-General of the United Nations and Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi were held the same day, 22 April, in the course of which they considered ways and means to assist the various Syrian parties in launching a transitional political process aimed at creating a new Syria where the entire population and all factions would enjoy protection. In that meeting, Mr. Ban called upon the Security Council to come together and exert all its efforts to achieve a political solution. He also expressed his support for the efforts of Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi for that purpose, a call which was seconded by the Secretary General of the League of Arab States. We make the same appeal to the Security Council today. Undoubtedly, in the end, all those efforts will lead to the implementation of the Geneva Communiqué which can be modified to take into account developments that have taken place since its adoption.

In conclusion, I would like to express my deep gratitude for the contacts between the Security Council and the League of Arab States in conformity with the agreement reached last September.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Djibouti.

Mr. Olhaye (Djibouti): I speak on behalf of the member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

At the outset, Mr. President, I hasten to congratulate your country most sincerely, as well as you and your team, upon Rwanda's rejoining the Security Council almost 20 years after the genocide. It is a remarkable achievement, and we salute the people of Rwanda and wish them continued full enjoyment of peace and stability.

The current status quo of political stalemate remains the most pressing concern and long-standing challenge to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the international community. Despite the promising reality following the granting of observer State status to Palestine by an overwhelming majority of States members of the General Assembly on 29 November 2012 (see A/67/PV.44), the OIC believes that the implications arising from the significant missed opportunities we have seen are definitely unfavourable, especially in the light of the highly unstable and volatile situation in the Middle East.

Despite the support granted by the majority of States Members of the United Nations to resolution 67/19 elevating Palestine to the status of observer State, Israel, the occupying Power, persists in carrying out illegal policies in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, by expanding settlements, building an apartheid wall, detaining thousands of Palestinians and illegally besieging the Gaza Strip. All these activities now threaten to undermine the prospects for the two-State solution and to destabilize the region. In that regard, the OIC calls upon the international community to ensure Israel's halt of its settlement policies and enable the Palestinian people

to exercise their inalienable rights, in line with United Nations resolutions and international law.

The detention of Palestinians is very alarming. That miserable and hopeless scenario is repeating itself, against the backdrop of pervasive Israeli repressive and inhumane measures, and shows no sign of ending. The resort by Palestinians to refusing food can be seen as a rejection of the widespread harsh and injurious Israeli instrument known as administrative detention, which is administered by military courts, so as to detain Palestinians indefinitely, subject to half-yearly reviews.

At this critical time, the OIC underlines that prompt action aimed at upholding the principles of right, justice and freedom; the enforcement of international law; and the implementation of resolutions of international legality constitutes an obligation and a responsibility of the Security Council. Such action is necessary in order to maintain the prospects for peace and to accelerate its realization through fulfilling the Palestinian people's national rights to self-determination and independence; finding an equitable settlement for Palestinian refugees based on General Assembly resolution 194 (III); resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict; and, ultimately, achieving a durable peace in the region that will lead to the establishment of an independent State of Palestine on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The OIC remains very concerned over the human rights violations committed against Palestinians in Israeli prisons. The death of the Palestinian prisoner Maysara Abu Hamdieh last month in an Israeli jail not only exposes the inhumane policies and systematic violations perpetrated by the Israeli occupation against Palestinian prisoners, but also requires the international community to take urgent and effective action in order to defend Palestinian prisoners' human rights, save their lives and pressure Israel to respect its obligations towards Palestinian prisoners in accordance with international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions, and to release them immediately.

The OIC underlines that the blockade imposed by Israel on the Gaza Strip constitutes a collective punishment of the civilian population; has a serious social, economic and humanitarian impact on the living conditions of the Palestinian population; and represents a serious threat to regional peace and stability. In that regard, the OIC reiterates its firm and unwavering demand for an immediate end to the illegal and inhumane Israeli blockade and the opening of all crossing points controlled by Israel, to allow for the free movement of persons and goods into and from the Gaza Strip.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation is very concerned over the deteriorating situation and the ongoing bloodshed, violence and destruction of property in Syria, and it stresses the need to preserve Syria's unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. The OIC therefore calls for the immediate cessation of the violence, killing and destruction, for the respect of Islamic values and human rights, and for saving Syria from the danger of an all-out civil war. It is sad, indeed painful, to acknowledge that the minaret of Syria's famous twelfth-century Ummayad mosque in Aleppo has today been destroyed.

The OIC urges the Syrian regime to immediately stop the killing of its citizens and engage in a serious dialogue between the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces and representatives of the Syrian Government, in order to pave the way for a transition process that would enable the Syrian people to achieve their legitimate aspirations for democratic reform and change.

However, the OIC, while reiterating its commitment to a peaceful solution to the crisis in Syria, calls upon the international community, in particular the Security Council, to assume its responsibilities and act promptly to stop the killing, destruction and displacement perpetrated against the Syrian people, and to find a peaceful and lasting solution to the Syrian crisis.

In closing, I wish to reaffirm the full support and solidarity of the OIC with the Palestinian people in their endeavour to regain their legitimate and inalienable national rights, including their right of return and self-determination and the establishment of their independent Palestinian State on their national soil, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, at the outset I should like to extend to you my sincere congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I should like also to thank you for having convened this open debate on the situation in the Middle East. Let me also express my country's support for the statements either made or to be made later by the speakers on

behalf of the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Non-Aligned Movement.

I should like to begin by offering our condolences to the United States of America in connection with the victims of the criminal terrorist acts that took place in Boston last week. I wish also to reaffirm the sympathy and solidarity of the Saudi people with the American people. We feel deeply the grief suffered by the families of the victims, and we wish a speedy and full recovery to the injured, who include Saudi nationals.

Regrettably, the achievement of peace and the reaching of a just and equitable solution to the question of Palestine seems to remain a disappointing mirage. Israel continues to show its defiance and its disdain for the international community's will by proceeding with the expansion of settlements and by reaffirming its determination to persevere in that policy. In addition, it mistreats and devalues the lives of the Palestinian prisoners held in its jails by subjecting them to oppression and starvation, which led this month to the death of the martyr Maysara Abu Hamdieh.

Moreover, settlers continue to launch brutal attacks and assaults on Palestinians, the latest of which was the deliberate running over on 9 March of a 9-year-old Palestinian child by the name of Malik Adel Al-Shaer.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia calls on the Council to act to protect prisoners. We call on the Human Rights Council, the International Committee of the Red Cross and humanitarian organizations, as well as human rights organizations, to closely monitor the situation of Palestinian prisoners and detainees, and to expose violations of their political, human and physical rights, as well as the severe criminal negligence that is inflicted upon them. We call on the international community to compel Israel to respect the rights of children, just as we draw the international community's attention to the report issued by UNICEF in February 2013 that explicitly depicts the brutal and inhuman punishments meted out by Israel and its occupation forces on the Palestinian children held in their prisons.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, indeed, all Arab countries continue to unequivocally choose peace as the strategic option; their good intentions were reflected in the launching of the Arab Peace Initiative in 2002. However, the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people and its continued contempt for and threats against Haram Al-Sharif are undermining any chance to achieve a just peace. Such a peace must be based on a globally agreed two-State solution, according to which the independent State of Palestine would be established with holy Jerusalem as its capital on land occupied by Israel within the borders of 4 June 1967.

The time has come to end the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, the Syrian Arab Golan and occupied Lebanese territories. The time has come for the Middle East to enjoy a just, comprehensive and equitable peace. The time has indeed come for Palestinian refugees to return from the diaspora and have their aspirations realized pursuant to General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The time has come for all citizens of our region to enjoy the fruits of peace and to live in security and stability. It is time for our societies to achieve the development and prosperity they deserve. We have had enough aggression, enough settlements, and enough occupation.

The situation in sister Syria is deteriorating by the day. So far, more than 70,000 people have been killed, as noted in the joint statement issued this month by United Nations humanitarian agencies. Similarly, in the past week the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has provided alarming figures about Syrian refugees, whose numbers are expected to reach more than 3 million. This problem has become an untenable economic burden on neighbouring countries. In fact, it has become a serious threat to security and stability in the region.

Through resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly, the world has condemned the Syrian regime, which continues to struggle to maintain power over the bodies of Syrian children, women, the young and the elderly. Moreover, the League of Arab States, which represents the conscience of the Arab community, has stressed the need to reach an equitable solution by enabling the Syrian people to defend themselves, to preserve their rights and dignity, and to achieve their aspirations to freedom.

We have lately witnessed the bold steps taken by the Syrian opposition to unite and form the National Syrian Coalition, which has been recognized by more than 100 countries in the world as the representative of the Syrian people. Moreover, the Coalition has been invited to assume the Syrian seat in the League of Arab States. The time has come for the Syrian people to regain their due position in international organizations and bodies.

The Syrian people have spoken loudly and declared their will by demanding the departure of the Al-Assad regime, which lost its legitimacy as soon as it committed aggression and atrocities against its own people. The search for an equitable solution in Syria must begin by allowing the Syrian people to open a new chapter in their lives — a chapter upon which the sun of freedom will shine and which will allow them to exercise their genuine right to choose their own leadership and their representatives away from the authority of this tyrannical regime.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mrs. Dunlop (Brazil): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing and the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine for their interventions.

As we enter the second quarter of 2013, the situation in the Middle East remains a source of grave concern for the world. The peace process between Israelis and Palestinians remains perilously stalled. The situation in Syria is deteriorating still further and the spillover effect on its neighbours, with a full-fledged humanitarian crisis, is ever more serious.

Despite the international community's best hopes that appropriate conditions for the resumption of negotiations on the two-State solution will eventually prevail, the continued occupation of Palestine indefinitely prolongs the uncertainty, instability and insecurity so detrimental to both Palestinians and Israelis. This state of affairs is untenable, and we must see progress towards two States living side by side in peace and security. That will be beneficial for the Israelis, the Palestinians and the world as a whole, as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict constitutes one of the most serious challenges to international peace and security.

The illegal construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, continue to pose the most significant and immediate threat to the two-State solution. Brazil reiterates yet again its call on Israel to cease all settlement construction immediately and unconditionally, to reconsider its decision to build in the so-called E-1 area, and to dismantle all settlement construction. Settlements are illegal under international law, constitute a major obstacle to peace, and contribute to the indefinite protraction of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We must recall that Israel, as the strongest party and the occupying Power, bears the greater responsibility to take steps in order for peace to thrive.

Brazil followed with keen interest and expectation the recent visit of United States President, Barack Obama, to Israel and Palestine, and the subsequent talks between Secretary of State John Kerry and leaders of the region. We do hope that the resumption of effective Palestinian-Israeli negotiations will once again figure as a top priority for all involved. We urge Israelis and Palestinians to take advantage of the momentum that Brazil hopes will soon be generated and to show the political resolve needed to reach the goal of an independent, democratic, contiguous and economically viable Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, living side by side with Israel.

Although economic measures alone cannot substitute for progress in the political arena, we are convinced that fostering inclusive economic development in Palestine is essential to consolidate the State and build a solid basis for lasting peace.

In the same vein, the active engagement of Israeli and Palestinian civil societies with their Governments and with each other can contribute significantly to peace efforts. Indeed, many civil society organizations from both sides are a source of hope in the search for peace. It is important to give adequate voice to those civil organizations devoted to reconciliation, solidarity and sustainable peace. They should receive greater attention from multilateral organizations, including UNESCO and the Human Rights Council.

In addition to the efforts of individual actors to bring about the resumption of peace negotiations, the Security Council must actively carry out its Charter-based responsibility to promote peace in the Middle East, as it currently does in so many other parts of the world.

Turning to Syria, let me express our dismay at the continuation of the unabated violence against civilians and at the destruction of a brotherly country in a conflict that has simply lasted far too long and taken too high a toll. It must come to an end. Brazil reiterates its strong and unequivocal condemnation of all violations of human rights and humanitarian law perpetrated by all sides. As we have consistently pointed out, the primary responsibility to protect civilians lies with the Government of Syria. At the same time, we recall that

all parties must fulfil their obligation to halt violence and fully abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law.

Brazil views with serious concern allegations that chemical weapons may have been used in Syria. We believe that it is essential that this issue be dealt with in accordance with established legal procedures, in an impartial and transparent manner. We recall Syria's obligation under the 1925 Geneva Protocol and reiterate our view of the importance of Syria's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

If the violence is to end, all stakeholders, especially those who have significant influence on the parties, must actively seek to convince all sides that there is no military solution to the conflict and that they must engage in a Syrian-led negotiation process. For this purpose, it is critical to stop the flow of weapons into Syria, which further feeds the erroneous perception that military victory is a realistic possibility. Meanwhile, civilians continue to bear the brunt of doubtful political calculations.

We commend the work of the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi. Brazil regrets that political differences have prevented this body from engaging in the implementation of the final communiqué of the Action Group for Syria of June 2012. The elements contained therein provide the guidelines for a viable negotiation process that will open the way to putting an end to the crisis and meeting the legitimate claims of the Syrian people for democracy, economic opportunity and social justice, while preserving the independence and territorial integrity of Syria. We continue to firmly believe that a Syrian-led transition can be attained only through comprehensive national dialogue. In this sense, we should listen carefully to the proposal of Guatemala for a second meeting of the Geneva Action Group for Syria.

In view of the grave deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria, Brazil continues to urge all parties to facilitate safe, unfettered and immediate access for humanitarian organizations to all those in need. We praise the humanitarian assistance provided to Syrian refugees by neighbouring countries. Brazil has been contributing financially through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to mitigate the plight of the refugees and internally displaced persons. Consideration must also be given to the lifting of all unilateral sanctions that affect the lives of the civilian population, in line with recommendations contained in reports of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic of the Human Rights Council.

Finally, let me briefly refer to Lebanon. Brazil commends President Sleiman and the Lebanese Government for continuing to adhere to the dissociation policy. We call upon parties in Syria and actors in Lebanon to effectively cooperate with the Lebanese Government in its efforts to preserve such a key policy.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Diallo (*spoke in French*): I should like to express my warmest congratulations to you, Sir, on the assumption of the presidency of the Security Council by your country this month. There is no doubt that on the day when the results are assessed, the international community will remember the positive momentum that you gave to this body.

I appreciate this opportunity to share with the Council the conclusions of recent deliberations held by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People on the issue that is central to its mandate. Meeting on 17 and 18 April in Caracas, Venezuela, at the invitation of the Venezuelan Government, our Committee called on the international community to re-engage with Israel and the State of Palestine and to remove the obstacles to negotiation. We called for a revitalized Quartet, which should coordinate with key regional players and report to the Council on its efforts and progress made.

In Caracas, we strongly condemned settlements and demanded their removal. We also asked the Council and the high contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to uphold their responsibilities to ensure a end to settlement construction in the occupied Palestinian territories. The meeting in Caracas deplored the abuse of Palestinian prisoners, who are often detained without trial, leading to hunger strikes and deaths. Participating delegations also demanded the immediate release of all prisoners, including children, women, elected officials, pre-Oslo detainees, and those held without trial.

We expressed optimism that the passage of General Assembly resolution 67/19 would accelerate the

momentum in the Council towards full United Nations membership for the State of Palestine. We considered the vote on 29 November 2012 was a kind of vote of confidence, as Palestine meets the Charter criteria for statehood and is ready and willing to assume the responsibilities that come with United Nations membership. That is why we called on States that recognize Palestine at the United Nations to establish diplomatic relations with it.

We confirmed that the State of Palestine may avail itself of the dispute-settlement mechanisms provided by the International Court of Justice, and supported any action by Palestine to participate fully, effectively and constructively in the work of the United Nations and its conferences, including, for example, by signing treaties and conventions, including the Rome Statute. We also called on the international community unequivocally to support Palestinian unity.

Finally, at the Caracas meeting it was decided to ask the General Assembly to proclaim an international year of solidarity with the Palestinian people in 2014 and to launch a global campaign to bring an end to the Israeli occupation of the occupied territories, realize the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, and promote a just, lasting, and comprehensive negotiated peace. Those, Sir, are the decisions that we took in Caracas and that the Committee, through me, wishes to convey to you.

The President: I now give the floor to the Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Mayr-Harting: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The acceding country Croatia; the candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro; and the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Albania, align themselves with this statement.

Let me start with the Middle East peace process. Ending the conflict is a fundamental interest of the European Union, as well as of the parties themselves and the wider region. For this reason, the European Union reiterates the urgency of renewed, structural and substantial peace efforts in 2013.

The European Union commends and supports the diplomatic efforts currently being deployed by the United States to facilitate this process, including the personal commitment of President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry, and urges the parties to engage in good faith and with the necessary political will. The European Union also recalls the particular importance of the Arab Peace Initiative, which provides regional support for a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement.

The European Union is aware of the obstacles that stand in the way of a comprehensive peace between Israelis and Palestinians, but it also believes that a decisive breakthrough is possible and that it must take place very soon. Waiting for supposedly better circumstances is not an option, as the time for implementing a two-State solution is running out.

The European Union reiterates that Israeli settlement activities, which are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and undermine the viability of the two-State solution. The European Union recalls its long-standing concern about the extensive use by Israel of administrative detention without formal charge.

The new opportunity for peace must be seized and must be about more than simply getting the parties back to the negotiating table. Greater mutual confidence between the parties needs to be created. An appropriate framework, including parameters, is needed if negotiations are to have a chance of succeeding in a reasonable time frame.

The European Union stands ready to give active and concrete support to these efforts with all the instruments at its disposal. The emphasis that the European Union has placed in recent months on economic development in the occupied Palestinian territory — in particular in Area C of the West Bank — is fully in line with the options and initiatives currently under discussion. The European Union is ready and willing to take its support to the next level in order to help to ensure that resumed direct substantial negotiations between the parties are successful. In the same spirit, the European Union remains fully supportive of ongoing efforts aimed at Palestinian reconciliation under the leadership of President Abbas, in line with the principles set out in his speech of 4 May 2011.

The European Union condemns in the strongest terms the latest rocket fire from Gaza and rocket attacks against the Israeli city of Eilat, and reiterates its fundamental commitment to the security of Israel. It is vital that all parts of the agreement on the

cessation of hostilities be implemented. On the same line, the European Union also urges once again the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) in all its parts. The European Union will also continue to work to reduce actions on the ground that threaten the success of a renewed talks process.

The European Union understands that Salam Fayyad has decided to resign as Palestinian Prime Minister but that he will, for the time being, remain at the head of a caretaker Government. The European Union commends him for the remarkable results he has achieved in institution-building and in strengthening the rule of law over almost six years in a very challenging role.

The European Union recalls that, as the largest donor to the Palestinian Authority, it has played a major role in bringing about these achievements, which led international financial institutions to declare that the Palestinian Authority is above the threshold for a functioning State. The European Union stresses in this regard the importance of the Palestinian Authority's fiscal sustainability and economic viability. It underlines the necessity for the transfer of Palestinian tax and custom revenues to be made in full and on a regular basis.

If an agreement to finally end this conflict, which has lasted for decades, were to be reached, the door would open to a deepened and enhanced cooperation between the European Union and all the countries of the region, bringing benefits to all involved and contributing to the prospect of a new era of peace and prosperity throughout the Middle East.

Allow me now, Sir, to turn to Syria. The humanitarian briefings last week in this Council (see S/PV.6949) painted a horrific image, underscoring once again how civilians, and among them women and children, are paying the price for the fighting. The European Union recalls that the Syrian regime bears the primary responsibility for the ongoing violence, and condemns the widespread and systematic violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law. We continue to witness indiscriminate shelling with heavy weaponry and air and Scud missiles attacks by the Syrian regime; just recently we have heard reports about another onslaught of the regime forces close to Damascus, killing at least 109 people — many of them civilians — in the single suburb Jdeidet Al-Fadel.

The European Union recalls the latest report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, which states that crimes against humanity and war crimes have been committed in Syria. In this regard, let me stress that all parties to the conflict should commit to their obligation to abide by international humanitarian law — including the protection of medical facilities, staff and patients — and hold to account those in their ranks who do not. The European Union recalls that there should be no impunity for any such violations and abuses.

Syria has not responded to the repeated calls of the international community to ensure accountability through a national procedure. The European Union therefore wishes to recall that the Security Council can refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, as requested in the Swiss letter to the Security Council of 14 January 2013, at any time. The European Union calls on the Security Council urgently to address the situation in Syria in all its aspects, including this issue.

We are maintaining our efforts towards reaching a credible political solution through a Syrian-led political transition principally based on the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012, and leading to a democratic, peaceful and inclusive Syria. In this regard, the European Union welcomes the establishment of the Syrian National Coalition, which the European Union accepts as a legitimate representative of the Syrian people, as a crucial step forward. We fully support Joint Special Representative Brahimi's efforts and the proposals he made on 29 January. In his briefing just a few days ago, he emphasized that the initiative of dialogue that was proposed in February by Sheikh Moaz Al-Khateeb should be further developed, not discarded.

The European Union is therefore encouraged by the acceptance by the Coalition of the principle of a political process under credible conditions. It is of the utmost importance that all Syrian opposition forces act in a united way towards achieving a democratic transition in Syria in the inclusive framework of the Syrian National Coalition. The European Union looks forward to working with the interim Chairman, Mr. George Sabra, to that end. In that regard, we also welcome the opening of the office of the Syrian National Coalition in New York.

Alongside its diplomatic action to promote a political settlement, the European Union is the leading

humanitarian donor in the context of the Syrian conflict, as part of a wider international response. The total European Union response to the crisis, including pledged support, has reached a level of close to €800 million committed by the European Union and its member States. However, that is still an insufficient amount to cope with the growing number of persons in need. We are particularly grateful to the Governments and peoples of Syria's neighbouring countries for the generosity they have shown, and we call on Member States to honour the pledges they have made, including those made most recently at the Kuwait Conference.

However, money is only one aspect of the problem. Given the quickly deteriorating situation and the high risk to the overall stability of the region, an effective delivery of aid to all those in need is urgently required. As was requested by Under-Secretary-General Amos in her statement before the Council last week (see S/PV.6949), the European Union will take steps in line with humanitarian principles to provide humanitarian assistance to all areas in the country, including those currently not reached by humanitarian aid.

The complex situation on the ground and the difficulty in gaining access require that the European Union work with the Syrian National Coalition where necessary to calibrate its response to the real needs of the population inside Syria. The European Union also urges the regime in Damascus to allow delivery of humanitarian assistance by whatever routes are most effective, in order to reach all the population in need, including across borders, and to allow a broader scope of humanitarian actors to work in Syria. We welcome the fact that the Security Council was finally able to agree on joint messages in that regard after the humanitarian briefing, but more is required from the Council.

The Syrian conflict has already spilled over beyond Syrian borders. The crisis is escalating in a dramatic and unpredictable way, with a huge potential to destabilize the entire region. We urge the Security Council to actively follow the situation in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey and other spillover threats. The European Union recalls the obligation of the Syrian authorities to respect the sovereignty and integrity of neighbouring States and condemns its violations of those principles.

Lastly, the European Union is extremely concerned by allegations that chemical weapons might have been used in Syria. We emphasize that any use of chemical weapons, whether by a State or a non-State actor, is abhorrent and must be unreservedly condemned. The European Union and its member States have addressed a letter to the Secretary-General welcoming his decision to start an investigation into that matter. We remain convinced that the seriousness of the allegations that have been made warrants a full, independent and impartial investigation and that such an investigation should commence quickly and cover all serious allegations about the use of chemical weapons in Syria. All parties in Syria, particularly the Syrian regime, must cooperate fully with the investigation, including by providing unimpeded access for investigators. They must also ensure the safety and security of chemical weapons stockpiles, pending independently verified destruction under supervision by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

The President: Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I would like to recall that all speakers shall limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Umemoto (Japan): At the outset, I would like to thank Ambassador Eugène-Richard Gasana, Permanent Representative of Rwanda, for his leadership in convening this open debate. I would also like to express appreciation to Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing.

Japan has long understood the Palestinians' aspiration to build an independent State and has supported the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. Japan thus endorses a two-State solution, under which Israel and a future independent Palestinian State would coexist, side by side, in peace and security. In the light of that position, Japan voted in favour of General Assembly resolution 67/19 regarding the status of Palestine at the United Nations in November 2012.

Japan once again calls upon Palestine to immediately resume direct negotiations with Israel and not to use its non-member Observer State status, granted in accordance with the General Assembly resolution, to act in a way that might negatively affect or hinder direct negotiations with Israel. We ask for prudence with respect to its conduct, such as applying for membership in international organizations, an action that might negatively affect prospects for the resumption of negotiations.

Israel, for its part, should freeze its settlement activities in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The transfer of tax revenues, which Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, is a necessary task that Israel should conduct for the fiscal stability of the Palestinian Authority. In that regard, Japan appreciates Israel's resumption of the transfers in March.

With respect to the issue of Palestinian prisoners, Japan worries that that issue could worsen Palestinian sentiment and thus negatively affect the peace process. We hope to see the new Israeli Administration create conditions for a resumption of meaningful negotiations.

As for the situation in Gaza, Japan is concerned by the sporadic rocket fire into Israel that occurred recently, despite the ceasefire brokered by Egypt in November 2012. We urge all parties concerned to respect the ceasefire with a view to realizing a durable calm in Gaza.

The entire international community should mobilize the political and economic means at its disposal to help Israel and Palestine overcome their differences and realize substantial progress this year. Japan welcomes the renewed commitment by the United States to the peace process following President Obama's visit to the region in March 2013. At this critical juncture, we need to engage with key stakeholders in Arab and other regions in a more effective manner. In that context, Japan renews its commitment to making an active contribution — in cooperation with the United States, Arab countries, the Quartet and other partners — to that end.

Japan has been committed to assisting Palestinian State-building efforts since the Oslo accords. During the past fiscal year, Japan provided assistance in the amount of approximately $85 million, including budget support for the Palestinian Authority and contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We have also been addressing the needs of socially vulnerable communities in East Jerusalem, Area C, and Gaza by implementing various projects in fields such as job creation and the social participation of youth, child education, health services and hygiene.

Japan has been promoting regional cooperation. Our initiative "Corridor for peace and prosperity" has been making steady progress since 2006. In addition, Japan launched a new cooperation framework among East Asian countries to assist Palestinian development by co-hosting, together with Palestine, the first Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development in February 2013 in Tokyo. As a follow-up, a meeting among participant countries' aid agencies and a business leaders' meeting are each scheduled to take place during the course of this year. We believe that synergetic effects can be generated with the new United States initiative that Secretary of State John Kerry recently announced on business expansion in the West Bank.

Allow me now to touch upon the question of Syria. Japan is deeply concerned by the serious and deteriorating situation in Syria and profoundly deplores the death of many thousands of people as a result of the continued violence. The briefing to the Council by United Nations humanitarian organizations last week (S/PV.6949) was yet another occasion to listen to appalling accounts of the tragic incidents taking place on the ground there every day.

As an active member of the Group of Friends of the Syrian People, Japan reiterates its call on all parties in Syria to immediately halt the violence and abuses of human rights, and condemns the Syrian authorities for not keeping their own commitments and responsibilities to protect their own citizens.

It is hardly realistic to expect a smooth political transition with President Al-Assad remaining in power. At the same time, we need to deal with threats posed by extremists. From that standpoint, Japan supports the diplomatic efforts of Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, and hopes that the Syrian National Coalition, widely acknowledged by the international community as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people, will consolidate its base to play a major role in advancing the process of a Syrian-led political transition.

We regret to see that the Security Council has failed so far to take necessary action to bring about a political transition in Syria, despite its primary responsibility in maintaining international peace and security in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. In such circumstances, Japan will favourably consider Qatar's initiative to seek the avenue of the General Assembly to underscore the urgent necessity to stop violence and explore a political solution based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex).

With regard to chemical weapons, Japan urges the Syrian authorities to refrain from using them or transferring them to non-State actors in any circumstances. Supporting the Secretary-General's investigation into all alleged use of the weapons, Japan also demands that full and unfettered access be granted to his investigation team by the Syrian authorities.

Lastly, there is an urgent need to address the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria. Japan urges all parties in Syria to ensure rapid and unimpeded access for aid organizations to those in need, and to cooperate fully with the United Nations and relevant organizations to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The funding situation also needs to be improved. I would like to announce that Japan has already disbursed a total of about $65 million that it pledged at the high-level international humanitarian donor conference for Syria, held in Kuwait City in January. As a result, Japan's assistance has now totalled $80.5 million. We remain committed to significantly contributing to international efforts and encourage other donor countries to do so as well.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Al-Jarman (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of April.

The question of Palestine remains the foremost issue in the Middle East, and the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Undoubtedly, the Arab-Israeli conflict, which has lasted for over six decades, will not be resolved until the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories comes to an end; the legitimate rights of the Palestinians, as acknowledged by legitimate international declarations, are realized; and a sovereign, independent and contiguous Palestinian State is established.

Palestine achieved a great breakthrough last November when it ascended to the status of a non-member observer State in the United Nations, with the support of the majority of the Member States. We hope that the achievement will be further built upon by greater international recognition of the State of Palestine within the 1967 borders, with holy Jerusalem as its capital.

The continued expansion by the Israeli occupation authorities of settlement activities in the heart of the West Bank, Jerusalem and its surroundings, especially after the ascension of Palestine as a non-member Observer State; the continued expulsion of Arab inhabitants from their homes; and the expropriation of their properties are blatant evidence of the insincerity of Israel's claims about its desire for peace, and further undermine efforts to create a Palestinian State and its national authority. The gross legal and human rights violations carried out by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people and its lack of respect for its international obligations are further evidence of that insincerity.

The United Arab Emirates reiterates its condemnation of all Israeli practices that have seriously hindered international efforts for peace and exacerbated the tense and unstable situation in the entire region. We renew our call on the international community, especially the Security Council, to shoulder its full responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations to pressure Israel to halt its illegitimate activities and for the expeditious resumption of peace talks towards a fair and comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian question on the basis of the two-State solution, as indicated in the Arab Peace Initiative.

We are deeply concerned about the grave humanitarian and economic situation of the Palestinian people, especially in the Gaza Strip, as a result of the continued blockade and closure of the entry points, leading to grave violations of international law, including the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. We call on Israel to end the blockade, pursuant to resolution 1860 (2009); to remove all its military checkpoints from other Palestinian cities and villages; and immediately and unconditionally to release Palestinian prisoners held in inhumane conditions in Israeli jails.

The United Arab Emirates is following with great concern the deteriorating humanitarian conditions of the Syrian people and Syrian refugees and the escalating violence and displacement in the Syrian Arab Republic. We call on the international community to shoulder its humanitarian and political responsibility to halt the great tragedy being endured by the Syrian people. We emphasize the sovereignty and integrity of Syria and the need for a political process that would end the bloodshed and preserve the unity of Syria through an orderly transition of authority. The United Arab Emirates has shouldered its responsibilities towards the Syrian people by providing relief and aid to the refugees

in neighbouring Arab States and by supporting Arab international initiatives in that regard.

We renew our support for the efforts of the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, to resolve the crisis peacefully, in accordance with the terms of reference of his mandate.

We renew our commitment to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and were deeply disappointed by the postponement of the conference on the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destructionin the Middle East, which was to be held in March 2015. We call for that conference to be held without delay, for all relevant parties to participate, and for Israel to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and subject all its facilities to the comprehensive guarantee system.

We call upon the Islamic Republic of Iran to cooperate fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency, to fulfil its international obligations, and remove all doubts and concerns about its nuclear programme. We hope for a peaceful solution to that crisis that would remove the shadow of danger from our region, alleviate doubts concerning the nuclear programme in Iran and reaffirm its peaceful nature.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Israel occupies Arab land in Lebanon and Palestine, yet no one at the international level has acted to put an end to those occupations. The overwhelming enthusiasm that some are expressing for the Security Council to adopt resolutions under Chapter VII dissipates when it comes to Israel, although the occupation has been going on now for over half a century. Israel is committing documented, systematic violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. But, paradoxically, no official in Israel has ever been punished for that.

Today we have heard suggestions that certain dossiers should be referred to the International Criminal Court, but that desire disappears when it comes to Israel, whose violations have clearly reached the level of war crimes or crimes against humanity. Israel is implacably pursuin its settlement activity, to which many have referred today and which has been widely condemned. The surface area of the settlements has risen by 182 per cent. The number of settlements has gone up 189 per cent. Paradoxically, there has been no international response to deter Israel. Israel has been spared the sort of military and economic sanctions that are imposed on others, even though everyone is agreed that settlement building is illegal and an obstacle to peace.

Israel is behaving in flagrant violation of international law. The paradox is that Israel is considered by some to be a racist, thuggish State when it comes to international law. Israel has not respected any of the resolutions adopted against it. It has enacted more than 60 racist resolutions against the Palestinian people since 1968.

Paradoxically, no genuine calls have been made for the freeing of the Palestinian prisoners. Very few have called for the Israeli detention camps to be opened up to international observers or non-governmental organizations, even though a great number of detainees have lost their lives due to torture, medical negligence or hunger strike, or have been killed in a premeditated way.

Israel introduced nuclear weapons into the Middle East, and in so doing precluded the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in our region. But the paradox is that none of the threats and sanctions imposed or pressure exerted on certain States, particularly those that have peaceful nuclear programmes in conformity with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, have been applied to Israel, despite the danger that Israel's weapons represent for the region and for the world. These are the realities and the paradoxes that some States with influence within the Organization try to sweep under the rug and turn our attention from because these realities are crystal clear.

How should we answer someone who might quite rightly ask why we in the United Nations are failing on the political, humanitarian and ethical fronts to meet our responsibilities to deal with the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and to put an end to these flagrant violations by Israel? Is it possible or admissible for certain States to impose their own biased agendas on our Organization? Everyone has the right to know openly whether this failure of our Organization is desired by those influential States, or whether it is just the result of a lack of power, collusion and weakness on the part of States? Or should we consider the Israeli occupation as something that transcends international law and accountability because Israel enjoys the favour

of a specific country? If that is the case, then let us call things by their name; our Organization should not be called the United Nations, but the organization of the countries of major influence.

The United Nations and its Members must act. Since it began 65 years ago, the Palestinian nightmare has not sufficed to provoke the conscience of the international community into adopting earnest measures that would lead to a fair solution for the Palestinians and restore their legitimate rights, rather than simply making pointless and vain speeches before the Security Council and other international forums. What can the United Nations and its Member States say to the Syrian people who remain under Israeli occupation after more than 45 years? What can the United Nations say to them when they call into question the credibility and effectiveness of the United Nations? It is the United Nations that has been incapable of taking real measures against Israel to force it to implement relevant resolutions, in particular resolution 497 (1981).

What can we say about the absence of necessary international efforts to put an end to Israeli settlement-building in the Golan? What can we say about the inability of international human rights mechanisms to put an end to Israeli humanitarian and human rights violations? How can we respond when we see that there is no international reaction?

The indiscriminant and racist policies and practices of the Israeli regime continue. They continue to remove people from the separation area. Israel is building a separation wall in the occupied Golan. What can we say about the shots fired towards Syrian territory? And what of the licence that Israel and the United States have granted themselves to explore for oil in the Golan?

These are all questions that I would put to members and ask for responses, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. Israel is assisting terrorist groups in the separation wall area and ensuring that wounded terrorists get to Israeli hospitals so that they can be treated in Israel before they are brought back to Syrian territory along the same line of separation. We must be aware of the fact that the aid provided to these terrorist groups in the area of separation is not simply a blatant violation of international law but also endangers the lives of United Nations personnel in the area.

On 6 March, terrorist groups kidnapped 21 peacekeepers who were working in the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force. The terrorists were allowed to take the hostages to Jordan so that their photos could be taken with the terrorists. Israel then authorized the return of the terrorists to Syria.

As I have in other statements that I have made with regard to the situation in the Middle East, I would like to underscore the fact that it is dangerous to introduce other subjects under this agenda item because that could undermine the historic importance of this agenda item and divert our debates from their primary objective of considering ways to put an end to the Israeli occupation. Therefore, I am not going to respond to the vindictive allegations made against my country, Syria, by certain delegations because I do not want to fall into the trap of burying the real point of this agenda item.

However, we have a great deal to say to refute the vindictive allegations made by States that support and arm terrorists, sow fanaticism and destruction in Syria, and work to ensure that all peaceful solutions to the crisis will fail. I am referring to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, Israel and certain countries of the European Union, some of which are members of the Council. All of them are engaged in provoking an inter-Islamic conflict as a substitute for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to bury the Palestinian cause and distance themselves from the mess of the two-State solution. In their clever statements today, the representatives of that alliance of States have confirmed our conviction that they seek by every possible means to steer attention from the point at hand — the situation in the Middle East — in order to put the situation in my country, Syria, under the spotlight.

The situation that has developed is a humanitarian situation and they want to turn it into a political crisis with a humanitarian angle. In that connection, I call on the representatives of Saudi Arabia and Qatar to direct the content and provocative nature of their statements to the miserable living conditions endured by the populations of their two countries. Those populations are deprived of a constitution, a parliament, civil and political liberties and any form of national opposition, not even a formal one. Saudi and Qatari politicians have spread Salafi, Wahhabi, Takfiri terrorism and perverted the precepts of Islam, which is based on tolerance. Those same politicians are today responsible for shamefully sacrificing the lives of tens of thousands of Muslim youth throughout the world under the pretext of Jihad for the sake of petrodollars.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khazaee (Islamic Republic of Iran): I have the honour to address the Security Council at this meeting on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). I wish to convey the Movement's appreciation for Rwanda's presidency of the Security Council for having convened this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory regrettably continues to deteriorate owing to the oppressive, violent practices that Israel, the occupying Power, continues to inflict on the Palestinian people in violation of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law. Regrettably, since the last open debate (see S/PV.6906), despite regional and international peace efforts, Israel, the occupying Power, has continued its colonization of Palestinian land, its blockade of the Gaza Strip, its military raids and arrest campaign, and all forms of collective punishment of the Palestinian civilian population under its occupation.

As stressed in the recent meeting of a delegation led by the NAM Chair with Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-moon and the March President of the Security Council, the deteriorating situation of the thousands of Palestinian prisoners and detainees, which are being unlawfully held by Israel, the occupying Power, is a matter of grave concern to the Movement. Furthermore, Israel's violent suppression of non-violent civilian protests against the occupation, particularly against the abuse of thousands of Palestinians in Israeli prisons, including the recent torture and killing of a Palestinian detainee and in solidarity with prisoners on hunger strike, as well as against Israel's settlement, wall and colonization of Palestinian land, has caused extensive casualties and further destabilized the situation and is a matter that preoccupies the Movement.

We, the Non-Aligned Movement, condemn the continued unlawful detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians, including children, women and numerous elected officials, who continue to be held under harsh, inhumane conditions and subject to physical and mental ill-treatment. In that regard, the Movement condemns, inter alia, Israel's use of torture and all other forms of physical and psychological mistreatment and deprivation of Palestinian prisoners. The Non-Aligned Movement calls for the release of all Palestinian political prisoners.

The Movement condemns ongoing Israeli settlement activities, which constitute grave breaches of international law and violate numerous United Nations resolutions, including resolutions of the Security Council, as well as other illegal practices in the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel, the occupying Power, continues to defy international law and the will and demands of the international community with that destructive, provocative and illegal practice, which is threatening the realization of a just and peaceful solution.

Thousands of Palestinians have been displaced from their lands in the Jordan Valley, where thousands more are at risk of displacement due to Israel's illegal colonization, as well as in and around occupied East Jerusalem, where the occupying Power continues to pursue measures aimed at the quiet transfer or depopulation of the indigenous Palestinian inhabitants and at ensuring a Jewish majority in the city. Violence and terror also continue to be waged by extremist Israeli settlers against the Palestinian civilian population and at Muslim and Christian holy places, including in Jerusalem.

The Non-Aligned Movement calls for a complete end to all Israeli settlement activities, the construction of the wall, home demolitions, residency revocations, excavations, including near Al-Haram Al-Sharif, the closure of Palestinian institutions in the city, a cessation of the transfer of Israeli settlers to Palestinian land and an end to their lawlessness. The Non-Aligned Movement also calls for the complete lifting of the blockade of Gaza and for international attention to the severe humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

The Non-Aligned Movement stresses the urgent need for action by the international community to redress the unjust and critical situation endured by the Palestinian people under Israel's almost half a century of military occupation. The relevant United Nations resolutions and international law must be implemented. The responsibilities of the Security Council, which is mandated to maintain international peace and security, are clear. It is high time that those responsibilities were upheld. The Security Council cannot remain on the sidelines. It must act to advance efforts to resolve the prolonged and tragic conflict as a result of which the Palestinian people have too long been denied their inalienable human rights, including to self-determination and to return, and the freedom of

an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Turning to Lebanon, the Movement condemns Israel's ongoing violations of Lebanon's sovereignty. It calls on all parties concerned to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006) in order to end the current fragility and to avoid a resurgence of hostilities. Such actions also constitute a threat to international peace and security and are a continuation of Israel's aggression against Lebanon.

Concerning the occupied Syrian Golan, the Movement is concerned about the recent violation of the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces, which brings the risk of tension, escalation and confrontation in the area. The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms that all measures and actions taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as Israeli measures to impose its own jurisdiction and administration in that area, are null and void and have no legal effect. The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The States members of the Non-Aligned Movement reiterate their continuous calls on the Security Council to act urgently in order to send a clear message to Israel, the occupying Power, that all those illegal actions must be fully halted forthwith and that it must comply with international law.

Let me now speak in my national capacity. I would like to refer to the present political and security situations in the Middle East region, which is becoming increasingly fragile and precarious. That is particularly true with regard to the situation in Syria.

The Islamic Republic of Iran believes that any foreign military involvement against Syria would only exacerbate the crisis and extend the insecurity to other countries in the region. Therefore, Iran is of the view that the way out of the present crisis in Syria lies in strengthening a comprehensive and peaceful political process aimed at establishing, first and foremost, a cessation of violence between the parties and the holding of a national dialogue between the opposition and the Syrian Government for a peaceful political process. The regional countries should cooperate with one another to facilitate such dialogue and national reconciliation. To that end, the Islamic Republic of Iran has actively participated in talks with regional countries, in particular Egypt and Turkey. It seems that there is no alternative if we want to restore peace and stability to Syria and to the region.

Turning now to what was said against my country by the representative of the Israeli regime in the Chamber, it is not my delegation's intention to comment in detail. I would like to point out only that the Islamic Republic of Iran has officially declared its commitment to the fundamental principles of the Charter to refrain from the threat or use of force against any member of the United Nations. The Israeli regime, with a dark history of terrorist activities, possessing hundreds of nuclear warheads and known as an illegal force in the world, would do better to keep quiet and to stop threatening other countries. At the very least, the Council should demand that the Israeli regime abandon its policy of flouting international law and the Charter of the United Nations and immediately desist from resorting to the threat or use of force.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Sergeyev (Ukraine): First of all, I would like to convey our appreciation for Rwanda's presidency of the Security Council this month and for having convened this open debate at such a crucial point in time. At the same time, let me also thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing.

Ukraine is deeply concerned about the deterioration of the situation in the Middle East and in the Palestinian territories, in particular. It is our strong conviction that the solution to the question of Palestine should be based on the full implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as the Madrid Peace Conference formula and the Oslo Accords. The lack of progress achieved in the peace process, including on the settlement issue, lies at the heart of the Palestinian people's frustration. In that regard, I should emphasize that there is no alternative to the quest for peace and to the political solution of the crisis.

Ukraine rejects any acts of terrorism, by whomsoever, as a means of reaching any political goal. In our view, any violent or provocative actions by radical elements should be halted resolutely since they lead only to a further escalation of violence.

It is our belief that the momentum exists and that, under the current circumstances, there is no alternative for the parties but to overcome their differences and, for the sake of peace, to come back to the negotiating table. We strongly appeal to all sides to refrain from any unilateral actions that could further aggravate the situation or pre-empt the outcome of the final status talks.

I would like to reiterate Ukraine's determination to contribute further to the search for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In our view, such a peace will come about only on the basis of an agreement that ensures the Palestinian people's legitimate right to self-determination and statehood, while, at the same time, respecting Israel's right to peace and security.

Ukraine reaffirms its strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. We believe that the United Nations should retain its leading role in solving the Syrian crisis. We strongly support the efforts of Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi as the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria.

We are convinced that the parties to the conflict should do their utmost to bring about a sustained cessation of armed violence in all its forms, paving the way for a Syrian-led political transition. It is our belief that a national dialogue that includes all strata of the Syrian society, together with the introduction of social and political reforms, is the only effective mechanism to resolve the existing internal problems.

Ukraine, which fully supports the universal principles and norms of international law, joins the calls of the Secretary-General and his Special Representative to avoid the further militarization of the conflict and to alleviate the suffering of the innocent population. In that regard, as stipulated by a decree of the President of Ukraine, my country has, through the United Nations, provided humanitarian assistance to the Syrian civilian population, including Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries.

As to the way forward, we strongly believe that the Geneva communiqué creates all the necessary conditions for the parties to reach a peaceful political solution and to stop the violence.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Mukerji (India): Mr. President, let me begin by congratulating you on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April. I would also like to express our appreciation for the convening of today's quarterly open debate, which will allow the Council to take stock of recent developments in the Middle East, including the State of Palestine. I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his comprehensive briefing.

The Middle East peace process is passing through its most difficult phase in recent times. For more than two years, the parties have not held a single official meeting. The efforts of the international community, including those of the Quartet, have failed to make any impact on the ground. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the intensification of settlement activities is quickly eroding the very foundation of a two-State solution. The plight of ordinary Palestinians is worsening every day due to roadblocks and related occupation infrastructure that put restrictions on the free movement of persons and goods.

The blockade of Gaza has also continued to cause a great deal of hardship for the Palestinians. The plight of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails requires immediate attention. Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority is facing one of its worst financial crises, which threatens to erode the progress made in building Palestinian State institutions. If the present situation persists, the international community will risk seeing a serious destabilization of the region. It is therefore imperative that efforts aimed at breaking the deadlock and resuming the peace process be reinvigorated.

Any political process, to be meaningful, must put an end to Israeli settlement activities. Continuing settlement activities are a violation of international law and harmful to the peace process. We join others in urging Israel to stop settlement activities in order for the Palestinian side to come to the negotiating table.

We have noted that Israel has recently taken measures to allow the flow of basic goods into Gaza. Still, the continuing blockade remains in force and is adversely affecting essential services, economic activities and infrastructure development. We continue to call for the complete lifting of the blockade. The parties should also fully implement the provisions of the ceasefire agreement reached in November 2012.

The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, at its recent meeting in Brussels last month, underscored the urgent

need to close the Palestinian Government's financing gap, estimated at $1.2 billion for the current year. In that context, it is important that the international community continue to respond to the financial needs of the Palestinian authority.

Since the time of Mahatma Gandhi, India's support for the Palestinian cause has been strong and unwavering. India was the first non-Arab country to recognize the State of Palestine. Since then, India's bonds of friendship with the Palestinian people have been strengthened and reinvigorated by regular interactions. As a member of the Security Council in 2011 and 2012, India supported Palestine's bid for full and equal membership of the United Nations. Continuing that support, India co-sponsored the General Assembly resolution 67/19 in November 2012, which upgraded the status of Palestine to non-member observer State. India has consistently supported a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue with a view to achieving a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, living within secure and recognized borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, side by side and at peace with Israel, as endorsed in various Security Council resolutions and the Quartet road map.

India has also partnered with Palestine in socioeconomic development and has extended material assistance to the Palestinian Authority. As in previous years, India pledged an amount of $10 million in 2012 as budgetary support to Palestine. India also annually contributes $1 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. India is in the process of implementing projects, bilaterally and through the India, Brazil and South Africa Fund, including in the fields of information and communication technology, vocational training and school construction.

In conclusion, let me express our deep concern at the deterioration of the situation in Syria. We believe that the joint communiqué of the Action Group (S/2012/523, annex), adopted in June 2012, provides a good basis for resolution of the Syrian crisis. A Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of all sectors of Syrian society is the only way to resolve the crisis and must be seriously pursued by all parties concerned.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. León González (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba endorses the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. In my national capacity, I wish to highlight some aspects relevant to the matter at hand.

This is the second open debate this year on the Middle East region held at the Security Council without achieving any progress. It is unfortunate that the situation in the region, especially in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, has seen no progress. The region is still marked by instability and insecurity.

The main political problem in the Middle East is the systematic aggression by Israel against Palestine. The Security Council must play its role in defence of international peace and security and immediately adopt concrete practical measures to compel Israel to end its abuses and illegal policies and practices against the Palestinian people. Israel's behaviour deliberately contravenes United Nations resolutions and international law, poses a threat to regional and international peace and security, and violates the human rights of an entire people by means of flagrant, systematic and inhumane abuses that should be condemned by this organ. Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories remains the major obstacle to achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive solution in the Middle East region. There will be no peace in the Middle East as long as those aggressions persist and the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people are not taken into account.

The General Assembly adopted the historic resolution 67/19 when a majority of its members granted Palestine non-member observer status in the United Nations. Cuba supported that resolution, in accordance with its long-standing position in support of the cause of the Palestinian people and the defence of its rights. However, such action constitutes an interim step towards the eventual accession of Palestine to the United Nations as a fully fledged Member State. The Security Council must consider and approve, without further delay, the request made by Palestine in 2011 to be recognized as a United Nations Member State.

Today, the situation in the region is tense and explosive, due to the increasing number of illegal Israeli settlements, the harsh and distressing reality of Palestinian prisoners and the blockade to entry of goods, humanitarian aid and fuel in the Gaza Strip.

Palestinian prisoners lack rights to essential goods and services, namely, water, food, medical care, education, visits and legal defence. In addition, they are subjected to continous physical and psychological abuse. The recent death of a 64-year-old prisoner due to medical negligence by the occupying Power has led to violent clashes in East Jerusalem, Hebron and other localities of the occupied territory, where Israel's use of excessive force has injured dozens of people and killed two Palestinian adolescents.

Only an end to the settlement policy, the release of Palestinian prisoners and the lifting of the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip will make it possible to launch a significant political process that will bring peace to the region.

Cuba will continue to support the Palestinian people in their legitimate and just struggle for self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Cuba calls upon Israel to comply with international law and to put an end to its occupation of all Arab territories, and reiterates once again its support for a just and lasting peace for all the peoples of the Middle East region.

Cuba is closely following the situation in Syria and its international impact, aware of the fact that the information available is frequently manipulated. The calls made by those who promote regime change in Syria and rely on the use of force and violence are alarming. They should instead contribute to dialogue and negotiation between the parties.

The Security Council was not conceived as an instrument to be used by certain Powers to provoke regime change in selected countries. There is reason to be concerned about intentions to promote Security Council actions and declarations aimed at increasing violence, undermining a sovereign Government, generating insecurity and leading a nation to a social and humanitarian crisis with unforeseeable consequences.

The obligation of the Security Council is to promote peace, not violence; to prevent destabilization, not to finance, arm and train those involved in destabilization; and to protect the innocent, not to use and manipulate them for geopolitical purposes. That is also the responsibility of the Organization as a whole.

Cuba objects to NATO's maneuvering to have the Security Council approve the aggression in Syria. It also rejects the complicity of the mass media, which are accustomed to distorting reality and to not being answerable for their actions.

Cuba shares the concern about the loss of innocent lives in Syria and elsewhere in the world. It also condemns the acts of violence being committed against defenceless civilians by all those involved in that or any other conflict.

A civil war in Syria or a foreign-force intervention would have serious consequences for international peace and security, especially for the Middle East region. We reject attempts to turn the alleged protection of human lives into an excuse for foreign intervention, either directly or through support for irregular armed groups, including the use of mercenaries, who only sow destruction and multiply the number of deaths.

Cuba reaffirms the right of the Syrian people to the full exercise of their self-determination and sovereignty, without foreign interference or intervention of any kind. The role of the international community, in this time of difficulty for a State Member of the United Nations, is to offer its assistance in order to safeguard peace and stability in that country.

Finally, Cuba reiterates its rejection of the double standard prevailing in the Security Council. On the one hand, it can be very flexible and tries to ensure, through all kinds of pressure, that certain situations are considered in the Council. On the other hand, when the situation does not suit the interests of certain countries, it is slow to act, or simply fails to act, as in the case of Palestine. After dozens of resolutions by this organ, there has been no progress in achieving the establishment of a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. It has shown its inability to grant Palestine its well-deserved status of full United Nations Member and does nothing to stop the ongoing violations committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Silva (Sri Lanka): I join other speakers in commending you, Mr. President, for having convened this important debate. The Sri Lanka delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

The world must not forget the dire humanitarian situation of the Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory, especially in Gaza, where conditions are unsustainable. We stress the urgent need for the leadership to end the marginalization and oppression of Palestinians in their own land. International humanitarian law requires the protection of the civilian population in the occupied territories. It is regrettable that unethical practices continue that could erode the likelihood of a two-State solution.

The settlement activities run counter to article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) and are therefore a factor in the recurrence of violence in the region. The international community has repeatedly called for a freeze on settlement activity. The Security Council, the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, the Economic and Social Council and the International Court of Justice all have condemned the settlement activities as illegal. Ending those practices, which contribute to much human suffering and continuing friction in the occupied territories, are essential steps that need to be taken to improve the situation on the ground as well as for confidence-building.

The blockade imposed on Gaza has resulted in approximately 80 per cent of families in that location being dependent on humanitarian aid from the United Nations for their survival. Restrictions on imports and exports are stifling economic growth. Those restrictions need to be lifted within the framework of resolution 1860 (2009), as that would contribute significantly to the economic advancement of Gaza and the well-being of the people.

Sri Lanka also supports the work of the United Nations agencies in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which keep the majority of the people in Gaza supplied with the bare necessities.

Both parties to the conflict must create the environment necessary to facilitate peace. There is an urgent need for mutual confidence-building measures in support of efforts to resume dialogue and substantive negotiations. Israel must protect the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied territories and desist from actions that are contrary to the established rules of international law and practice. We are also mindful of the security needs of Israel. The indiscriminate attacks against Israeli civilians, including the firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel, will widen the gap between the parties. We encourage both parties to exercise the utmost restraint for the sake of the safety of civilians and for the greater goal of peace.

It is important to remain engaged in the process of finding a just and durable solution to the situation in the Middle East. Sri Lanka supports the implementation of the General Assembly resolutions regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and the attainment of a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders. The viability of the two-State solution will depend on the political unity and economic advancement of the Palestinian people, and we are confident that Palestinian internal reconciliation efforts will continue. The progress made by the Palestinian Authority despite the severe political and economic constraints is commendable.

Sri Lanka supports Palestine's application for admission to full membership in the United Nations, and it is our hope that the Security Council will give it favourable consideration.

In conclusion, Sri Lanka welcomes the declaration made in solidarity with the Palestinian people and State of Palestine adopted at the recent special meeting of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, held in Caracas.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Khiari (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to convey my sincere congratulations to you, Sir, on your presidency of the Council this month, and I thank you for holding this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing today.

Today we meet in our quarterly open debate at a time when the peace efforts are at a very difficult stage. The stalemate in the peace process has lasted for years now and there seems to be no hope for an end to the deadlock or a resumption of negotiations to achieve a durable, just and comprehensive peace that would put an end to the occupation and confirm the recognition of the Palestinian State as an independent and sovereign State, within the borders of 4 June 1967 and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We believe that full responsibilty for the stalemate lies with Israel's continued practices, as the occupying Power, its procrastination, its grave violations of international law and the basic terms of reference of the peace process, and its continued enforcement of a policy of fait accompli, enacted through further annexation of Palestinian territories, the Judaization of Jerusalem and its separation from its surroundings in the West Bank, which we denounce. Israel has also carried out forced expulsions and cancelled Palestinian identity cards, while increasing and intensifying its settlement activities and campaigns of escalating violence by settlers against Palestinians and against Islamic and Christian places of worship, including the Al-Aqsa mosque. The current violations and abuses against Palestinian prisoners in full view of the entire world are grave violations of the principles of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Firm and urgent action is required on the part of the international community to end the bloodshed, which cannot be prolonged or tolerated and which carries the risk of an escalation of the situation at any moment, especially in the light of Israel's continued policy of arbitrary arrests of Palestinians, including women and children. The practices of Israel as the occupying Power over the past decades can be considered a form of collective punishment, and the international community can no longer justify this policy to current and future generations.

We believe that the resumption of negotiations on a fair and honest basis requires putting an end to those practices in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem; addressing the question of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons; and immediately lifting the unfair and oppressive blockade of Gaza. Those measures are based on the principles of international legitimacy and are basic requirements for the resumption of the peace process.

Tunisia reaffirms that achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East is a comprehensive effort that can be realized only through an Israeli withdrawal from all Palestinian and Arab occupied territories, including the Arab Syrian Golan, a withdrawal to the pre-1967 borders and from the territories still occupied in southern Lebanon, and a recognition of the independence and sovereignty of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as the basis for a two-State solution in which Israel and Palestine live side by side in peace.

We also express our deep concern regarding the situation in the brotherly country of Syria, where the ongoing killing and destruction have had grave consequences for Syria and the entire region, in particular at the humanitarian level. We reiterate our support for the aspirations of the Syrian people to liberty, dignity and democracy, and we recall the resolutions adopted by the most recent Arab summit in Doha, which were mentioned by the representative of the League of Arab States in his statement. We also emphasize the need for an expedited political solution that would put an end to the crisis, which can no longer be tolerated or prolonged, while emphasizing the unity of Syrians and the territorial integrity of Syria.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Pedersen (Norway): In order for members to be able to go home before midnight, I have decided to circulate my speech but not read the whole thing. Members will thus have to promise to read it.

The civil war in Syria is a catastrophe with no end in sight. The situation of the millions of civilians in Syria and in neighbouring countries continues to deteriorate and has reached unbelievable dimensions. The country is being reduced to rubble, and the Syrian State is gradually collapsing. Cities and neighbourhoods are being destroyed under constant fire from missiles and heavy artillery on an appalling scale. There seems to be no end to the suffering of the civilian population. We are witnessing brutal suppression and indiscriminate killings. The conflict is spilling across borders and threatening regional stability.

The paralysis of the Security Council makes the situation worse. As a result, the dynamic of the conflict is becoming entrenched in a logic of violence. Norway urges the Council to take a clear and unanimous stand against the continuing and gross violations of international humanitarian law. The international community must, at an absolute minimum, stand up for the basic principles of international humanitarian law, even if it is divided over how to achieve a political solution.

We urge all countries to stop the flow of weapons into Syria. A political solution to the conflict is the only way to save the Syrian people from further suffering, for which the regime bears primary responsibility. Therefore, our message to Al-Assad is that he must start transferring executive power with a view to enabling a

meaningful political transition towards a pluralistic and representative Syria. Our message to the opposition groups is that they must contribute to a meaningful political dialogue and negotiate within the framework of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex). Our message to the Security Council members is that they must find a way to promote a political transition based on the Geneva communiqué. We must give our full support to the work of Joint Special Representative Brahimi.

Norway is committed to a democratic, pluralistic and unified post-Al-Assad Syria. We support the efforts of the opposition groups to organize themselves on a more inclusive and representative basis. In the current situation, Norway regards the Syrian National Coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. We are assisting the Coalition in building up capacities to provide practical help on the ground and to train people for a future pluralistic and democratic Syria. The litmus test is whether we succeed in making the situation better for all Syrian people, ensuring that the rights of all minority groups are protected. Thus, whether they are men or women, Alawite, Druze, Kurd, Sunni, Shia or Christian, all Syrians should be guaranteed a role in shaping the future of Syria.

We are facing a humanitarian crisis of colossal proportions. The Syrian Government has shown a flagrant disregard for the humanitarian consequences of its indiscriminate warfare. The opposition groups are also guilty of serious disrespect for fundamental humanitarian principles regarding the protection of humanitarian personnel and installations. We therefore call on the Syrian Government and the opposition groups to respect international humanitarian law and fundamental human rights and desist from the despicable practice of gender-based violence. Those responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes must be held accountable.

Since March 2011, Norway has provided $75 million in humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees and to those who are suffering inside Syria.

Let me now turn to the Middle East peace process. On 19 March, Norway chaired the spring meeting of the donor support groups for Palestine — the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) — held in Brussels. Twenty years have passed since the AHLC was set up to build the foundations for a Palestinian State and to develop its institutions. To fully succeed, the State-building exercise may need to be accompanied by meaningful steps towards the two-State solution. If that vision is lost, the willingness of donors to contribute will indeed diminish.

The financial situation is serious. Palestinian revenues are insufficient for a balanced budget, while donor contributions have declined in recent years. Last year, the Palestinian Authority's deficit reached $1.4 billion, with donor contributions covering only $826 million. At the meeting in Brussels, the donors promised that they would continue to provide funds, and contributions may reach $1 billion for 2013. That could cover most of the Palestinian budget deficit this year, but it will not resolve the long-term challenges.

More and more donors are questioning the sustainability of the current approach. They are asking whether we are not in fact financing a permanent occupation, given that there are no substantial improvements in those areas or signs of a rapid resumption of negotiations. The recent resignation of Prime Minister Fayyad reflects the increasing frustration of the Palestinians. I salute my good friend Mr. Fayyad for his steadfast work over many years on building up a sustainable Palestinian economy and laying a solid foundation for the establishment of a Palestinian State.

The parties need to recommit themselves to achieving a two-State solution. The Israeli occupation and Israeli settlement activities remain the main problem and must stop. Rocket attacks against Israel from Gaza must also stop. Donors need to see meaningful progress before the next AHLC meeting in September, which should be convened at the political level. We need to address the tough questions regarding the continued relevance of our efforts and strategies as donors. I appeal to the donors to continue to provide funding for the Palestinian Authority during this difficult transition.

The President: I now give the floor to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Valero Briceño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela endorses the statement delivered by Mr. Mohammad Khazaee, Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Helping to build a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East is one of the main challenges of the United Nations. The lack of respect for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and self-determination of the countries of the South have been recurrent practices of colonialists and imperialists in times past. Even today, those practices are still used to retain their already questionable hegemony.

Now they are turning to new notions to disguise their purposes while relying on the most advanced technologies of the military, killing innocent civilians, including women, children and the elderly. They sponsor the fragmentation of national States, fueling ethnic, religious and cultural differences while seeking to impose political models that are alien to the realities of countries that have their own historical traditions. They foster mercenary activities and spread terrorism in order to change the political and legal structures of countries and steal their wealth. The mass media organizations present these terrorists as redeemers seeking independence and democracy. That interventionist logic disrupts peace and stability in the Middle East.

Venezuela is concerned about the warmongering actions of Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people, which systematically violates the human rights of that heroic people. The State of Israel keeps some 5,000 political prisoners in deplorable conditions. Arbitrary arrests, harassment and intimidation are the order of the day. The construction of illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and the criminal blockade against the people of Gaza continue. UNICEF estimates that each year, about 700 Palestinian children aged 12 to 17 are arrested, interrogated and detained by Israel's army, police and security agents.

Over the past decade, about 7,000 cases of cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment in the Israeli prison system have been corroborated. Since 1947, the State of Israel has failed systematically to implement the relevant resolutions of the United Nations advocating a two-State solution, shirking its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations. The principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, are ignored by Israel. It is undeniable that those who, by act or omission, support such policies bear their share of responsibility for the situation.

Following the adoption in the General Assembly of resolution 67/19, granting the status of non-member observer State at the United Nations, the occupying Power withheld legitimate Palestinian tax revenues and defiantly asserted that it would continue to build its illegal settlements in order to make a State of Palestine unviable. The occupying Power is attempting to change the cultural and historical identity of the Palestinian people, thereby compromising its territorial integrity and self-determination.

The Venezuelan people admire the endurance of the Palestinian people and support the right of Palestine to be a full Member of the United Nations, in accordance with the provisions of its founding Charter. We demand that Israel withdraw to its pre-1967 borders in accordance with resolution 242 (1967). We endorse the right of the Palestinians to have East Jerusalem as their capital. We insist that the Palestinian refugees enjoy their right to return to their homeland. We demand the release of Palestinian prisoners, and an end to the occupation of the Syrian Golan. Those who have committed crimes covered by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court must pay for their crimes.

Our delegation stresses the importance of the special meeting of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, held on 17 and 18 April in Caracas. At that meeting, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine, Mr. Riad Malki, denounced the apartheid being practiced in the occupied Palestinian territories through an inhumane and infamous separation with zones, facilities, roads, transport and permits only for Israelis. It is scandalous that Palestinians require special permits to enter and move within their own territory. Venezuela endorses these demands of the Palestinian Minister for Foreign Affairs.

The Bolivarian Government believes that Syria must be respected. The only way to settle the conflict in that country is through political dialogue between the Syrian authorities and the opposition — an agreement among the Syrians themselves. We support the efforts of the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States to Syria, Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, and we express our concern over the effort to diminish or manipulate the importance of mediation and dialogue as the ways par excellence to achieve peace, while irresponsibly promoting war in order to dismember a sovereign State.

Venezuela deplores the fact that arms are being supplied from outside to groups involved in terrorist activities that refuse to take part in any political dialogue. Such interference by foreign Powers constitutes a clear violation of the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence, as they apply to Syria. The countenancing of diplomatic recognition by the United Nations of irregular groups acting independently of the Syrian State and using violence and terrorism to achieve their political aims is a undesirable precedent for international law. A negotiated solution among Syrians themselves is indispensable, urgent and essential. We encourage peace and will support the efforts of all those who genuinely seek it.

In Venezuela we cherish the ultimate goods — life and peace — and we will defend the principles of national sovereignty and self-determination.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Abdullah (Malaysia): I wish to thank you and your country, Rwanda, Mr. President, for convening today's important open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. My delegation would also like to express its appreciation to Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing. Malaysia associates itself with the statements delivered, respectively, by the representatives of Iran, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and by Djibouti, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Let me begin by addressing the most pressing priority for my delegation, which is the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. Despite last month's visit to the Middle East by the President of the United States, we have yet to see any meaningful progress on a two-State solution. Malaysia is deeply disturbed about the condition of the thousands of Palestinian prisoners and detainees who have been unlawfully detained by the occupying Power. It is a mockery of the rule of law that Israel, which time and again declares itself to be the only democracy in the Middle East, unlawfully detains elected Palestinian officials, as well as women and children. We are extremely concerned about the fact that a number of detainees have died in prison, which many Palestinians fear has been the result of torture by their Israeli captors. My delegation also condemns Israel's disproportionate use of violence against peaceful protesters opposing the maltreatment of Palestinian prisoners, which resulted, unfortunately, in casualties, including several teenagers.

Malaysia continues to strongly condemn Israel's ongoing settlement activities, which the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, the Economic and Social Council and the International Court of Justice, as well as the Security Council itself, have all declared to be illegal. If those bodies indeed sincerely believe that those settlements should be outlawed, they should join Malaysia in condemning the even more heinous practice of preventing Palestinians from building on and farming their own lands. We should not fool ourselves by thinking that Israeli settlers are innocently exploring unoccupied plots of land and untapped resources, seeking a brighter and more virtuous future. The harsh reality is that those illegal settlers have consistently committed acts of violence and harassment against Palestinians, and have deliberately invaded, stolen from or damaged Palestinian-owned olive groves during harvest time. Even the water from aquifers in the region is being diverted by settlers into Israeli pipes, to be used, among other purposes, for irrigating crops originally tended by Palestinians. One does not need to guess who will also benefit from selling overpriced water back to its rightful Palestinian owners, who are themselves denied the right to drill for water in their lands.

Sadly, while at the village level Israeli settlers coordinate to build houses on Palestinian soil, there is a similar degree of coordination in the macro-level planning and development of the E-1 area in order to undermine the future and viability of a State of Palestine. The international community may have awoken a little too late to prevent the illegal settlement activities, but now we should not hesitate to condemn and take action on the incidents of settler violence and other illegal acts, before the consequences become even greater.

The illegal blockade in Gaza remains in place, despite the urgent need to resolve the serious humanitarian situation there, especially with regard to the food security of its residents. Israel also continues to restrict entry for building materials, including those that could be utilized for building much-needed educational and health facilities. The occupying Power is literally taking away the building blocks for the peace process, and at the same time is starving the population to death. Malaysia therefore demands a complete and

immediate end to the illegal blockade. What is left for the Palestinians when their homes, land, food, water, groves, mosques, schools and hospitals have been taken away? There are many wrongs that must be addressed concerning the question of Palestine. In that regard, Malaysia reiterates its support for an independent State of Palestine in all of the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel in 1967, including East Jerusalem as its capital.

Malaysia would also like to underline its concerns about the situation in Syria. We have always believed that a political solution to the crisis there is achievable, but it should be based on resolutions 2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012), as well as the joint communiqué of the Action Group for Syria issued in Geneva on 30 June 2012 (S/2012/523, annex). My delegation underlines the need for a Syrian-led inclusive political process that is acceptable to the Syrian people and meets their collective aspirations and legitimate rights.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Ms. Gunnarsdóttir (Iceland): During the reopening of the Security Council Chamber last week, it was noted that the Chamber is possibly the most important room in the world. That is because of the Council's responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. In the case of Syria and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however, it is clear that the Council has not been able to live up to its responsibility. In those two cases the Council has been sidelined, owing to its own inaction. That not only reflects negatively on the United Nations and the members of the Council, it is also bad for world peace. In that regard, Iceland wholeheartedly supports the sentiments expressed by the leaders of various United Nations agencies in an article published in the *New York Times* on 15 April, which ended with the words "Enough! Summon and use your influence, now, to save the Syrian people and save the region from disaster." The Council does not have the luxury of waiting while Syria is destroyed in front of our eyes. A political solution has to be found.

That brings me to the unresolved question of Palestinian refugees, since they are being uprooted once again as a result of the civil war in Syria. Of the half-million Palestinian refugees in Syria, 400,000 are currently in need of humanitarian assistance. Approximately 200,000 are internally displaced in Syria, and 42,000 have fled to Lebanon, where the situation in the Palestinian camps is, to say the least, very difficult to begin with. That turn of events should be a wake-up call for the international community to realize how urgent it is that we find a just and lasting solution to the plight of Palestinian refugees, as is called for in General Assembly resolution 194 (III). They have been waiting for 65 years. The civil war has also drawn attention to the unresolved question of the occupied Syrian Golan, which also needs a plan of action from the Security Council in the light of the developments on the ground.

As there has been no progress in the peace process since the last open debate (see S/PV.6906), I will focus on the role of the Security Council and some of the activities taking place in the occupied Palestinian territories, which clearly demonstrate the dire realities of the occupation and that the situation on the ground is far from being stagnant, unlike the peace process.

In this regard, we call attention to the deteriorating security situation for the Palestinians, with notable increases in fatalities and injuries caused by Israeli forces, as well as continued settler's violence; continued demolitions of Palestinian property, with a total of 192 structures having been demolished since the beginning of this year, resulting in the displacement of 355 people, according to information provided by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; continued and accelerated settlement activities, which are illegal under international humanitarian law and should be stopped altogether; the high number of Palestinian children between the ages of 12 and 17 who are arrested, interrogated and detained each year by the Israelis, amounting altogether to approximately 700 children every year, according to UNICEF; and the fact that there appears to be a pattern of ill treatment of child detainees.

Finally, Iceland would like to take this opportunity to urge the Palestinians to reinforce their efforts towards reconciliation, which is largely in their own power to achieve.

Iceland would once again like to reiterate its calls on Security Council to take on a more active role in solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, considering the extreme asymmetry between the two parties and the need for impartial intervention, including by visiting the State of Palestine, reaffirming the illegality of the settlements, and accepting the application of the State of Palestine for United Nations membership in light of

the overwhelming support of the membership for the Palestinians' inalienable right to self-determination.

Finally, as regards Syria, Iceland would like to reiterate its calls on the Council to refer the situation since March 2011 to the International Criminal Court, and to come to a common position on how to address the civil war in Syria and its humanitarian consequences.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Percaya (Indonesia): Allow me at the outset to thank the Rwandan presidency of the Security Council for convening this open debate. We are also grateful to the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, for his briefing.

Before I go further, the delegation of Indonesia would like to associate itself with the statements made by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Permanent Representative of Djibouti on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Like other members of the international community, Indonesia remains concerned over the absence of progress in the peace process between Israel and Palestine. Attempts to resume dialogue and substantive negotiations between the two parties have been made to no avail. Nonetheless, we are encouraged by the recent efforts of the concerned parties to revive the path of peace, and create an atmosphere conducive to progress. In this regard, Indonesia remains fervently supportive of the two-State solution of Israel and a viable and independent Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace and security, on the basis of the principle of land for peace and a just and comprehensive peace consistent with relevant Security Council resolutions, the road map of the Quartet, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Yet, Israeli policy in the occupied Palestinian territory, especially its continued illegal settlement activities, continues to prove to be an intractable obstacle towards that objective. Continued Israeli settlement activity not only compounds the problem of the fragmentation of the West Bank, but also signals a complete absence of commitment to engaging the Palestinians in fair and realistic negotiations.

In Gaza, the humanitarian situation remains debilitating as Israel's severe blockade hinders the movement of people and goods, thereby leading to increasing unemployment and the shrinking of private businesses and economic activities. Accordingly, Indonesia again urges Israel to stop ignoring and defying relevant United Nations resolutions and international law, which it has done without repercussion or consequence thus far.

It is discouraging to note that within the past year, there has been only one positive development in the Palestinian cause. That was last November's historic admission to the United Nations of Palestine as a non-member observer State. Regretably, that action of the General Assembly was met with extreme retaliatory measures by Israel. We are extremely concerned over Israel's continued inhumane and unlawful detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians, including children and women, who continue to be subjected to mental and physical mistreatment without recourse to just and impartial legal proceedings.

Many members of the international community, including Indonesia, have persistently condemned Israeli actions. Yet Israel continues to demonstrate its disregard for international law. We call on the international community to work harder to consolidate our efforts against Israel's violations of international law, and to ensure justice and freedom for the people of Palestine.

On the situation in Syria, a humanitarian catastrophe has regrettably continued to evolve, without proper response from the international community, including the Council. The situation on the ground has become so dire that it now threatens the stability of the region.

Against this unfolding crisis, earnest efforts to stop the violence must commence immediately. Members of the Council must put their differences aside and find the best way to convince all parties to the conflict to halt the violence. The grave humanitarian situation on the ground, particularly with reference to refugees and displaced persons, must be addressed as a matter of urgency. Finally, we must start without delay a political process that will lead to a permanent solution to the conflict, in accordance with the aspirations of the Syrian people.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Govender (South Africa): South Africa thanks Mr. Feltman for his briefing to the Council. We

congratulate Rwanda on assuming the presidency of the Council this month.

My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Today's debate is a welcome opportunity to underscore once again the importance of finding a lasting solution to the situation in the Middle East in general, and the question of Palestine in particular. As we have said in the past, these meetings have degenerated into talk shops about the situation, with countries restating their already known positions but without producing any meaningful outcome. The sad part about this is that, while we continue participating in these routine meetings, the people of Palestine suffer every day under the yoke of an illegal occupation, with the occupying Power relentlessly underming international law, including the resolutions of the Council, with impunity.

South Africa remains deeply concerned at the impasse in the Middle East peace process. Despite the recent efforts of the United States leadership to revive the peace process, the status quo remains. We hope that the new coalition Government of Prime Minister Netanyahu will remove all obstacles to the resumption of peace talks, including the construction of illegal settlements, and return to the negotiating table as soon as possible and in good faith.

Needless to say, the settlements are not only illegal under international law, but also remain a major stumbling block to the resumption of direct negotiations and the achievement of sustainable peace. The Israeli settlement activities are confiscating Palestinian territory essential for a future State and seek to isolate East Jerusalem from other main Palestinian cities, thereby seriously threatening the very achievability of the two-State solution in line with the overwhelming call for the creation of a sovereign, independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian State, coexisting peacefully alongside the State of Israel on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Israel should immediately stop its settlement activities as an obligation under various Security Council resolutions and international law.

With regard to the continuing violence, South Africa reiterates its condemnation of all acts of violence, regardless of where they come from, as they undermine the viability of the two-State solution. We are especially concerned by the continued abuses perpetrated by Israeli settlers against Palestinians and their property, including the uprooting of olive trees, assaulting and firing on Palestinians, and the demolition of Palestinian homes, mosques, churches and cemeteries. We hope that the Israeli authorities will take action against the perpetrators of such acts of aggression.

Israel's announcement last month of its intention to restart the monthly transfer of $100 million to Palestine was long overdue, and we remind Israel that the transfer of that money, which should never have been held back, is a requirement under the 1993 Oslo Agreements. We also welcome the decision of the United States Government to unblock of about $500 million, which was blocked after Palestine was admitted as a non-member observer State last year. We reiterate our view that the withholding of the funds is an illegal and immoral retributive act that constitutes collective punishment of the Palestinian population and negatively affects the effectiveness of the Palestinian authority.

South Africa is concerned about the critical financial challenges that the Palestinian Authority faces. These challenges have the potential to reverse the gains made by Palestine in its institution-building project and to render the country unstable as service delivery declines. In that connection, we call on Israel to urgently lift all restrictions to allow for the development of the private sector, trade and other economic activities that could stimulate economic growth and address the Palestinian Authority's fiscal sustainability in the short-to-medium term. Sustained economic development is also critical to addressing the deep needs of ordinary Palestinians and to lift them out of abject poverty.

We have also taken note of the resignation of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and hope that his successor will provide the necessary leadership to ensure the socioeconomic and political stability of Palestine.

South Africa is deeply concerned about the plight of the Palestinians who are illegally held in Israeli jails. We deplore the death of Maysara Abu Hamdiyeh in March this year, whose death could have been avoided had it not been for medical neglect by the Israeli authorities. Israel should equally address and improve the living conditions of prisoners in order to end the ensuing hunger strike. Palestinian prisoners have long lived under appalling conditions in Israeli jails and the international community has not done much about their

plight. In that regard, we call on Israel to respect the human rights of all Palestinian prisoners and abide by relevant international human rights and humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israel should ensure their safety, allow access to them by family members and respect their basic human rights.

We reiterate our deep concern about the abuse of the human rights of Palestinian children and their detention. We are all very aware of the long-lasting adverse psychological effects that this will have on this vulnerable group. We have taken note of the February 2013 UNICEF report which, among other things, concluded that:

> "Each year approximately 700 Palestinian children aged 12 to 17, the great majority of them boys, are arrested, interrogated and detained by Israeli army, police and security agents. In the past 10 years, an estimated 7,000 children have been detained, interrogated, prosecuted and/or imprisoned within the Israeli military justice system — an average of two children each day".

Regarding the situation in Gaza, South Africa remains deeply concerned about Israel's continued blockade. We call for an end to that man-made and protracted humanitarian situation through the lifting of the blockade on Gaza. The blockade and restrictions imposed are in violation of international humanitarian law and contrary to the will of the international community as expressed in a number of Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1515 (2003) and 1860 (2009).

The efforts of the international community towards alleviating the humanitarian situation in Gaza are commended. For its part, South Africa has contributed an amount of 2 million rand to the humanitarian programmes run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East.

South Africa has always maintained that the future of Palestine is significantly dependent on the unity of its people. In that connection, we therefore encourage the Palestinians to strive for unity. In particular, we implore Hamas and Fatah to work together and collectively consolidate the gains of the Palestinian people. Learning from our own experience, we believe that intra-Palestinian unity is essential for long-term reconciliation and sustainable peace in Palestine.

In conclusion, the deteriorating situation in the broader region should not detract from our focus on achieving a permanent negotiated settlement between the two sides. It is therefore incumbent on the Security Council and the Quartet to continue to carry out their responsibilities without fear or favour and with increased focus. We further call on the Council and other stakeholders to accelerate efforts towards the holistic resolution of the Middle East crisis, including the Lebanese and Syrian tracks.

The President: I call on the representative of Botswana.

Mr. Ntwaagae (Botswana): Allow me to express my delegation's deep appreciation to you, Sir, for having convened this open debate, which provides us an opportunity to share views on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Not so long ago, my delegation delivered a statement in this Chamber in which we highlighted the significance of the transformative events ushered in by the wave of revolution in the Middle East inspired by a yearning for freedom and change. The international community has not been oblivious to the changing dynamics in the Middle East. While we as the community of nations respect the aspirations and the will of the people of that region to live in peace and dignity, we have a role to play in helping them achieve lasting peace and a sustainable livelihood.

As the people of the Middle East continue to strive for a better future, we need to play our part in helping them reconstruct, develop and build strong, inclusive and sustainable institutions of governance. Because we wish for the citizens of the Middle East what we wish for ourselves, we stand ready and willing to contribute in whatever way we can in shaping the Middle East landscape in order to improve the quality of life of the people.

It is for this reason that, under volunteer platforms such as CAPMATCH, my country pledges to support the people of the Middle East through tried and studied lessons of electoral conduct, democratic governance, public administration and the strengthening of enforcement agencies.

There is no doubt that the Middle East of yesteryear is completely different from the Middle East we know

now. It is a Middle East that is undergoing rapid socioeconomic and cultural transitions as part of globalization. Every day a new story unfolds, a new chapter in history is written and a new beginning dawns on the horizon.

Turning to the situation in Syria, my delegation continues to be concerned about the continued perpetration of violence and the increasingly deteriorating humanitarian situation in that country, which now has the potential to turn into a humanitarian catastrophe. The people of Syria continue to endure incalculable hardship and violent repression at the hands of the Al-Assad regime. Millions remain internally displaced, while others have sought refuge in neighbouring countries.

In that regard, my delegation will continue to condemn such attacks perpetrated against innocent civilians, in particular women and children. We call on the international community to continue its efforts to exert pressure in order to bring the perpetrators of those heinous crimes to justice.

We specifically call on the Security Council, as the custodian of international peace and security, to live up to its obligations, enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. How long will we remain bystanders while fellow human beings continue to be subjected to indignity and to be massacred by the very people who purport to have their interests at heart?

On the question of Palestine, Botswana has stated and continues to consistently express its position in various forums, including this body, that there is merit in the two-State solution. We believe in the coexistence of Israel and Palestine living side by side as two sovereign States that share not only a border but also a common desire for peace, security and prosperity. It is also imperative that all relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions be respected by both parties.

In that regard, we encourage all parties involved in the peace process to sit at the negotiating table and to embrace dialogue. We specifically urge the State of Israel to cease the construction of settlements in the Gaza Strip and to enable the negotiation process to proceed, free of intimidation and pressure.

In conclusion, Botswana reiterates the point that a stable and peaceful Middle East that is free of violence, with nations living side by side in harmony, is not only good for the peace and security of the region, which has enormous potential. It will also provide an environment conducive to a prosperous and peaceful Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Çevik (Turkey): Allow me first of all to express our appreciation to you, Mr. President, for having convened this open debate on the Middle East.

The Middle East has been going through a significant period of transition and change. At the heart of the challenges that we face in the Middle East lies the Palestinian question. That issue continues to poison the prospects for regional cooperation, welfare and peace. Turkey continues to support a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security with Israel and sitting side by side with us on an equal footing under this roof.

The revival of the Middle East process, which has been at a deadlock for some time, including the resumption of comprehensive peace negotiations between the parties for a just and lasting solution, has become increasingly crucial. That is especially important in the face of every passing hour, which makes a two-State solution less probable. In that regard, we appreciate the renewed engagement of the United States Administration in facilitating the peace process. Turkey, as always, is ready to contribute to all international efforts towards a just and lasting settlement.

Israel's illegal settlement activities present serious obstacles to the resumption of negotiations. It is time to seriously commit to and to respect the established parameters of the peace process. As such, the decision of the Human Rights Council in March to establish an independent international fact-finding mission to investigate the implications of Israeli settlements on the human rights of Palestinian people throughout the o occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, is noteworthy. The worrying situation of Palestinian prisoners under Israeli custody continues to be a great source of concern, which, as also demonstrated in the past month, has the potential to derail any desired advancement in the peace talks.

On that note, I would like to reiterate our position of denouncing violence regardless of the motives behind it. The illegal blockade on Gaza is

not sustainable. We expect the Israeli Government to lift the blockade, in accordance with its bilateral and multilateral commitments. The arbitrary closures of border crossings and other punitive measures against the civilian population in Gaza are counterproductive to what we are trying to achieve.

In the meantime, we shall continue to give our full support to Palestinian reconciliation, which, we believe, constitutes one of the pillars for peace in the Middle East. That important requirement should not be put on the back burner, behind the peace negotiations. It is also important that the Palestinian parties understand that reconciliation will deliver recognition of their role towards peace. Trusting the leadership of His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas, we will continue to urge the parties for an expedited outcome to their efforts. The international community should also be ready to lend its support to a Palestinian unity Government, followed by the holding of elections.

Turkey will continue to support the peace process, as well as the rightful aspirations of the Palestinian people, for an internationally recognized statehood, in accordance with United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Allow me to touch upon the humanitarian disaster just across our border with Syria. With more than 70,000 dead, 1.3 million refugees, 4.5 million internally displaced and 6 million people in need of urgent humanitarian assistance, the Syrian crisis is the fastest growing humanitarian crisis in the world. As we stated last week in the Chamber (see S/PV.6949), the international community has the moral responsibility to support the Syrian people in their struggle. That must be done urgently, collectively and decisively. The average number of daily crossings by Syrians into neighbouring countries has reached 8,000. It is not realistic to expect those countries to continue to absorb the influx of Syrian refugees at its current intensity. We believe that, pending a political solution, the international community should start to discuss unexplored ways and means to address the problems and needs of the internally displaced persons within Syria and to find alternative destinations for those who choose to leave their country because they feel insecure.

The foreign ministers of 11 countries of the Group of Friends of Syria, at its meeting in Istanbul last Saturday, agreed that immediate action must be taken to bring the Syrian conflict to an end. On the sidelines of the meeting, the Syrian National Coalition reiterated its very important vision of the new Syria – a democratic and pluralistic State based on the rule of law, where all Syrians, man and woman, will be equal, regardless of their ethnic, religious and sectarian backgrounds. Those statements are encouraging only as long as the international community unites and works hand in hand for all universal values in which we believe.

Let me conclude by sharing the view that 2013 is vital for peace in the Middle East. Now is the time for sincere and concrete action. There is an ever-growing need for concerted action towards a two-State solution.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Laram (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Two decades have passed since the launch of the peace process in its current form. However, it continues to be a failure because it focuses on managing the issue instead of on dealing with the root causes, namely, the continued Israeli occupation. Despite that failure, we believe that the window of opportunity remains open in the form of the Arab Peace Initiative, which has been on the table for over a decade. Arab countries continue to affirm their commitment to that peace plan. However, it is also clear that the window will not remain open indefinitely. It is therefore important to intensify efforts and work very seriously and quickly in order to take advantage of the opportunity before it is too late.

Based on the foregoing, the recent Arab League summit meeting, which was held last month in Doha, decided to form a ministerial committee headed by Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar. The committee has been given the task of liaising with the Security Council and the capitals of certain influential countries in order to promote the Arab Initiative. We hope that that effort will receive a positive response. It is important to pressure Israel to put an instant end to the settlement projects in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and to hold it to its commitments, including releasing prisoners that have been held since before the Oslo Accords, terminating the unfair and aggressive siege of the Gaza strip and ceasing to tighten the noose around the Palestinian economy.

The international community cannot turn a blind eye to efforts to Judaize the city of Jerusalem. It is an Arab city that will continue to be proudly Arab with

its different religions and ethnicities. We would like to affirm that there is no Palestinian State without Jerusalem and there is no Jerusalem without the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

It is also important to achieve Palestinian national reconciliation as a prerequisite for a just and comprehensive peace. All parties must work together in order to support and encourage all efforts that aim to achieve that reconciliation, instead of undermining them.

The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to deteriorate. Despite the ongoing military escalation, we note that the Syrian regime continues to lose control on the ground. Therefore, its insistence on remaining in power has forced it to go to extremes and attempt to impose a military solution using various methods against the steadfast Syrian people. Although the regime is legally and morally responsible for the protection of its people, it unfortunately continues to use excessive force, perpetrate massacres and target residential areas and sanctuaries, such as refugee centres, schools, hospitals, bakeries and houses of worship, even historical buildings and archeological sites. That confirms what is already clear to everyone — the regime has lost its legitimacy.

A few days ago, the forces of the Syrian regime and the militias supporting it committed another massacre, this time in Jdeidet al-Fadel, where they shelled and destroyed the only bakery in town. The massacre of Jdeidet al-Fadel and other massacres in Darayya, Houla, Karm al-Zeitoun and Al-Qubair and other placess are all crimes against humanity, that is, crimes against us all that are a source of shame for the regime in the eyes of humankind as a whole.

One of the most dangerous forms of escalation in Syria seen recently is the reported use of chemical weapons. In that regard, the fact-finding mission formed by the Secretary-General to bring out the relevant facts and investigate the various repercussions of those allegations, is of crucial importance.

The briefings by United Nations humanitarian affairs officials to the Council last Thursday (S/PV.6949) showed that it has been impossible to find a humanitarian solution to the Syrian crisis — the most dangerous humanitarian crisis in the world. We commend the efforts of the United Nations and the pledges of humanitarian aid to the Syrian people. However, we are concerned that the humanitarian crisis is deteriorating so quickly and in a manner that is beyond the international community's ability to respond in terms of aid and assistance. The danger is not limited to Syria alone; rather, the crisis has started to spread to neighbouring countries and threaten the entire region.

We would like to remind the Council that the longer the Syrian crisis remains unresolved as a result of the reluctance of the international community to resolve it and support the Syrian people, the harder it becomes to achieve a political solution, thus giving more space to the cycle of violence and the growth of extremism. In that regard, I would like to refute the lie that the Syrian regime has been peddling, namely, that its remaining in power is the only guarantee of safety for the minorities. In fact, the truth is completely the opposite — the oppression by the regime and its belittling of the Syrian people and homeland threaten every part of Syrian society.

Facing the urgency of the crisis, the Arab League has, from the very beginning, exerted efforts to create an atmosphere that would encourage the emergence of a peaceful solution. In that regard, we supported an important step, namely, the unification of the Syrian opposition in its political and military wings under the umbrella of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. That step was in response to an important demand by the United Nations and the international community. We believe that the United Nations must now, in accordance with Chapter VIII of its Charter, support the efforts of the League of Arab States in its capacity as the regional organization for the region where the Syrian crisis is unfolding.

The State of Qatar, in cooperation with most Arab States and a large number of other States, is submitting a draft resolution to the General Assembly aimed at supporting international, regional and United Nations efforts to achieve a political solution to the Syrian crisis. In that regard, we would like to note that we believe that it is of utmost importance for the Security Council to take unified action to put an end to the humanitarian catastrophe. The failure of the Security Council to take a position, stop the crisis and protect the Syrian people, as well as the Council's failure to deal effectively with the Palestinian cause, will have very dangerous repercussions for the Middle East region as a whole.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nicaragua.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, Mr. President, I would like to begin by thanking you for convening today's meeting and for the manner in which you have been leading the work of the Security Council this month. My delegation endorses the statement delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who spoke on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Yet again, we are meeting in the Security Council to discuss the subject of the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Yet again, we state our deep solidarity with that brotherly people. Year after year, for over 60 years, at various times, we have denounced the illegal occupation by Israel and its expansionist policies, which continue to undermine all efforts to achieve peace and reject the establishment of a Palestinian State that is sovereign and independent. Now more than ever and subsequent to the adoption by the majority of the international community of General Assembly resolution 67/19, we are inescapably committed to rectifying the historic injustice committed against Palestinian people. We consider that the vote in favour of the resolution by the majority of Member States constitutes a statement by the international community that Palestine complies with all the criteria laid down in the Charter to be a full Member State ready to assume its responsibilities as a nation that loves peace.

Our delegation voted in favour of the resolution out of solidarity and based on our position of principle in support of the Palestinian cause, which Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega Saavedra has always supported. Since the 1980s, Nicaragua has fully recognized the existence of the Palestinian State. Unfortunately, such full recognition has not yet been achieved owing to the lack of political will on the part of certain countries that are members of the Security Council, which, through the use of their veto power, stand in the way of that legitimate aspiration of the Palestinian people. As the veto remains the main obstacle to the achievement of peace and security, it is time for the Security Council to give thought, in a positive and unconditional manner, to the Palestinian State's request for full membership. We must continue to support all Palestinian efforts so that, sooner or later, Palestine can sit beside us as the 194th State Member of the United Nations.

Israel, following the decisive recognition by the General Assembly of Palestine's status as a non-member observer State, has, as a reprisal, stepped up its policy of occupation and its criminal blockade, continuing the construction of settlements and refusing to dismantle existing ones. Ignoring the will of the international community and causing the peace process to stagnate, in an attempt to impose conditions on negotiations, it continues to alter the demographic and religious makeup of the Palestinian territory, which represents a serious violation of international law.

Peace in the Middle East does not mean that we need only resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; a solution must also include the situation in the Israeli-occupied territories in Lebanon and Syria. Moreover, it should include peace in all countries of the region.

Nicaragua reiterates its appeal for respect for the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland, consistent with General Assembly resolution 194 (III), and calls on Israel to comply with all relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

We also reiterate our solidarity with Palestinian prisoners and political detainees, particularly women and children, who are being held in Israeli prisons and subjected to inhumane ill-treatment by those authorities. That has led to hunger strikes and even to the deaths of some detainees. We call for the immediate release of all Palestinians arbitrarily imprisoned by Israel. We call on the international community to continue its efforts in the context of a global campaign to show our solidarity in connection with this important problem.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, of which Nicaragua is a member, and the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for the efforts made to ensure the successful outcome of the recent meeting held in Caracas in solidarity with the Palestinian people and the achievement of the Palestinian State. The declaration adopted at that meeting will give a solid impetus to efforts undertaken in 2013, emphasizing the decision, as the Chairman of our Committee has just said, to request the General Assembly to make 2014 the year of solidarity with Palestine, in order to undertake a global campaign to put an end to the Israeli occupation.

We also welcome the regional Palestine seminar to be held in Ecuador in the coming year, which represents a unique opportunity for the Latin American and Caribbean region to show once again its full support for the Palestinian State.

Nicaragua reiterates its full solidarity with the Palestinian people in their quest to achieve their freedom and the exercise of their inalienable right to self-determination, including with respect to the establishment of a Palestinian State based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, laying the foundation for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East with both States, Palestine and Israel, living in peace in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and the aspirations of all peace-loving countries.

Lastly, we reiterate that it is time to put an end to the policy of double standards used by some permanent members of the Security Council and their allies. In Syria, instead of promoting dialogue and reconciliation, they are promoting violence and the militarization of the conflict, arming extremist groups with a view to achieving regime change. Such violence and militarization will have serious repercussions throughout the Middle East, but nonetheless those same members engage in delaying tactics so as to not recognize a Palestinian State, whose recognition and establishment would lead to the just and lasting peace that is so needed in the Middle East region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bahrain.

Mr. Alrowaiei (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset, Sir, to thank you for having convened this meeting and to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency this month.

The Kingdom of Bahrain has consistently reaffirmed its firm stance on the Palestinian question, which is based on the need to implement the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and to respect internationally agreed terms of reference. Efforts to achieve a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question can be successful only on the basis of the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in keeping with United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, the decisions of the international Quartet and the calls to lift the continued illegal Israeli siege on the Gaza Strip. We call on the international community to shoulder its responsibilities and to immediately move to lift the siege and alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people living in the Gaza Strip.

At the summit held recently in Doha, His Majesty King Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain stated that many recent developments and variables had set new conditions and created platforms for a peace in the Middle East based on the two-State solution, through the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on its national soil, with holy Jerusalem as its capital.

His Majesty also noted the need to adopt a new approach to the peace process in order to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the region, as well as the need to revitalize its mechanisms on all tracks, as those mechanisms have been brought to a standstill by Israel's refusal to abide by all relevant international resolutions. Such efforts should be carried out in coordination with the international community as a whole, on the basis of the terms of reference of international legitimacy, the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the 2002 Beirut summit and the principle of land for peace, ensuring that an end is put to the Israeli occupation, which started in 1967, and to settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories, including in particular holy Jerusalem.

A peaceful resolution of the Middle East problem must ultimately lead to an end to the Israeli occupation of the Arab and Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan, as well as the resumption of Israel's withdrawal from the remaining occupied Lebanese territories, in keeping with the relevant Security Council resolutions. It must also entail the establishment of an independent Palestinian State within the 4 June 1967 borders, with holy Jerusalem as its capital, and offer a just solution that would guarantee the return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

We would reiterate also the need to implement all relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and to unconditionally abide by the resolutions of international legitimacy, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits any demographic or geographical changes to areas under occupation.

Let me say in closing that peace in the Middle East is not just one option; rather, it is the only option. That will require the implementation of the two-State solution, of which the Arab Peace Initiative is one of the most important foundations. That requires that Israel, the occupying Power, stop its settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, which only

undermine all efforts, be they Arab or international, to achieve peace.

We call once again on the Security Council and other mechanisms, including the Quartet, to exert every effort to resolve this historical crisis in a manner that serves the interests of the peoples of Israel and of Palestine and preserves regional and international peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Mr. Lasso Mendoza (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank Rwanda, as President of the Security Council for this month, for convening this meeting. My delegation would like to express our views on the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine. We take note of the statement by Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs. My delegation would like to align itself with the statement made by the Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Government of Ecuador reiterates its concern over the protracted discussions in the Security Council on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. At this time of international political and economic upheaval, it is important to struggle for a just international system. In that context, the issue of Palestine has raised the international community's awareness of the question of what the United Nations should do. Member States should, now more than ever, be interested in ensuring the implementation of existing international laws and resolutions that advocate an end to the abusive use of force by Israel in Palestine.

One hundred and thirty Member States of this Organization supported the appeal made by the President of the Palestinian Authority on 29 November 2012 to grant Palestine the status of Observer State. That is an important achievement that must be supported and must serve as the basis for full-fledged recognition of the State of Palestine. It is time to seek out mechanisms that allow us to make progress in the efforts for peace and to enhance the capacity of the State of Palestine to meet the security needs of its own people. It is up to the Security Council to assume its responsibility for having enabled the continued Israeli violations of international law, which has allowed that country to maintain a status of immunity and impunity.

After the adoption of resolution 67/19, the Israeli Government announced that it would not recognize Palestine as a State or recognize any change in the situation of Palestinians. After 28 November 2012, in direct contravention of the peace process, Israel intensified its settlement activity in the occupied West Bank, and the situation deteriorated further with illegal and arbitrary detentions of Palestinians and the death of some of those detained. In the same vein, the demolition of houses has caused Palestinians to be displaced to neighbouring countries, undermining the entire peace process and inviting the condemnation of the international community against Israel.

Another Israeli reaction to the recognition of the Observer State of Palestine was the withholding, for the past few months, of Palestinian tariff revenues, in complete disregard of the 1994 Paris Protocol, which was signed by Israel and is still in force. My country, Ecuador, believes that it is now time to implement the Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels (resolution 67/1), which is applicable to all States in equal measure and to international organizations, including the United Nations and its principal bodies, so that the respect and promotion of the rule of law and justice guides all their activities. In that respect, my delegation would like to call upon the Security Council to abandon its passive attitude towards Israeli abuses, as that leads, to a certain extent, to the Council's becoming complicit in them.

In conclusion, Ecuador appeals to the international community to continue to support the request submitted by the President of Palestine to promote it from the category of Observer State to that of a full-fledged Member State of the United Nations, within the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. That is the only way that we will achieve peace and security in the Middle East and thus peace for all Member States of the United Nations.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 7 p.m.